no. 2

THE JOURNAL OF FICTIONAL REALITY

OMNIVERSE

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"The LIVES and TIMES of DOCTOR DOOM"

no. 2

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UFO

the journal of fictional reality

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# of Omniversal concern

UNIVERSE: A continuum of common reality.

MULTIVERSE: A group of related universes.

OMNIVERSE: The system of all multiverses.

Welcome to *Omniverse*.

With this second edition, *Omniverse* remains not merely the first but the *only* magazine devoted to the peculiar subject we term "fictional reality," the reality described in fiction. The success of our premiere issue—*Omniverse* #1 went into a second printing and has sold 3900 copies to date—leads us to believe that the study of fictional reality is an idea whose time has come. Never would we have suspected that such an esoteric pursuit would attract such a sizable following.

For those who missed our first issue, the question might be asked, "Why *Omniverse*?"

For any person who reads and enjoys fiction, there must first be a "willful suspension of disbelief," to borrow Coleridge's oft-quoted expression, an agreement with oneself to accept without reservations the premises upon which a given work of fiction is based. Without this "willful suspension," reading fiction is an uninvolving, empty experience. In some works of fiction, this disbelief suspension is slight: the laws that govern worlds of so-called "mainstream fiction" are very much like the reader's. In works of greater imagination, such as science fiction, fantasy, romances, and satires, the laws of the universe are at greater variance from the reader's own. Yet, if these more imaginative works are well-conceived and well-written, the reader is still able to adjust his sense of reality to accommodate the fiction he is reading.

Writers of imaginative fiction are not simply chroniclers of characters, but builders of worlds. The worlds found in fiction can be explored by all who journey through an author's written words. World-builders like Tolkien, Baum, Swift, Wells, Howard, Burroughs, and countless others, have conjured Realities whose beauty and power linger past the pages of the books in which they are described.

These fictional worlds are the province of *Omniverse*. By maintaining the "willful suspension of disbelief" *past* the printed page, we study and compare these worlds on their own terms, as if they were objectively real places. The writers of *Omniverse* carry on the intent of the world-builders through analysis, criticism, and extrapolation. While there are those who believe that fiction is meant for entertainment, not study, we believe that virtually anything that exists is worthy of study, and that study can be entertainment in itself.

Omniverse features articles exploring science, sociology, history, culture, religion—any aspect of a fictional world's reality. We compare a given fictional world not only with the readers' world, but with other fictional Realities. Towards this latter end, we use what we call the Omniversal Theory, a system of information governing the relationships of various Realities by assigning them unique niches in the superstructure of Man's imagination, The Omniverse. This theory is not a yardstick by which we measure a given world's verisimilitude, but a tool by which we can understand some of its metaphysics. Without a frame of reference, every article would need to establish its theoretical foundation before addressing its subject. It is not necessary to define the tenets of the Omniversal Theory here: they will become evident in the articles which follow.

A casual glance at this issue's contents reveals our emphasis is presently on the fictional worlds found in the unique medium known as the comic book. The comics produce a steady stream of information about fictional Realities; several hundred pages chronicling events on a single fictional world appear monthly, making the comics a gold mine of material for study. Further, comic books are the source from which the Omniversal Theory was derived. Because few original ideas have come from the comic medium, the comics are a melting pot of ideas borrowed from eclectic sources—science fiction, fantasy, mystery, romance, mainstream fiction, and other media. By synthesizing the Omniversal Theory from the comics, it is possible to encompass ideas that are in no way unique to any one medium. Hence, we can use a theory gleaned from information in this one medium as a basis for studying other realms of fiction.

But the comic books are not *Omniverse*'s sole area of fictional exploration. This issue we have an in-depth study of one of the greatest fictional heroes of the 20th Century, Sherlock Holmes, examining how the character as portrayed by his original chronicler differs from his portrayal by later authors. In future issues, such fictional stalwarts as Tarzan, Fu Manchu, the Shadow, the Wizard of Oz, and Dracula will be analyzed in a similar way. *Omniverse* also features a regular column devoted to a sampling of science fiction works, comparing the methods of inter-Reality travel they depict. In times to come, we hope to examine all realms of fiction, including motion pictures, television, drama, and even opera. All fiction is *Omniverse*'s domain.

Omniverse hopes to challenge its readers' intellects by taking fiction one step further than the printed page, to approach it with the same intellectual scrutiny with which one would approach any serious subject. We invite our readers not only to peruse the ideas herein, but to formulate their own. Send us your reactions to the articles in this issue for inclusion in our *Reality Lines* column. Or, present us with an idea for a feature-length exploration of a topic that interests you.

Omniverse is for readers of fiction who are not afraid to think. If that describes you, we invite you to bring along your sense of wonder and join us.

THE SOURCE OF SUPERMAN'S POWER

by
PETER GILLIS
art by
BILL BUKOWSKI

Faster than a speeding bullet? Okay—your average F-15 can do better than that even at a low altitude. More powerful than a locomotive? Sure—take two locomotives. Able to leap tall buildings in a single bound? But of course—you can construct a catapult made out of automobile springs and shoot something over the Pan Am Building. If Superman's powers were actually at that level, such a dissertation as this would be unnecessary. But, because the Man of Steel's abilities are so extraordinary, stretching our Laws of Physics until they read like campaign rhetoric, Superman's powers and their source must be re-examined, applying the Laws of Physics of our universe as stringently as possible.[1]

First let us consider Superman's origin. Krypton, a planet circling a sun some light-years distant, explodes. In what is the first warpdrive spaceship to be created by Kryptonian civilization, the infant Kal-El is sent to Earth. Immediately afterwards (on a cosmic scale), fragments of the exploded planet begin to land on Earth. Furthermore, they give off radiation; that is, they are radioactive. Upon brief inspection, it sounds reasonable: if the ship could make it, why not fragments of the planet? The problem is that rocks do not have a warp-drive. If we assume that they traveled to Earth in normal space at nearly light-speed, that would make Krypton a scant 10-15 light-years away. Superman first encountered Kryptonite as an infant.[2] However, why then was not the light or energy given off by Krypton's explosion visible on Earth at about the same time?[3]

The alternate solution to Kryptonite traveling to Earth through normal space is to assume they passed through some nexus into warp space. One tends to dis-

1. In order to have a methodology by which to examine fictional universes such as Superman's, we must assume that a) most physical laws are the same as in our objective universe except where specifically stated otherwise, and b) physical laws behave self-consistently. Without these assumptions, there would be no reason to attempt to explain Superman's powers at all.
2. Superman's first encounter with green kryptonite occurred when he was still an infant, according to *Superman* #173.
3. The light of Krypton's explosion did not become visible on Earth until *Action* #489 (November 1978). Although cover dates are meaningless in reckoning "comic time," we can assume that Krypton exploded no earlier than 1938 for the Earth-One Superman, which would mean that Krypton is within 40 light years of Earth.

credit too many natural, free-standing nexi; not only would they be terrible astrogational hazards, but they would also bespeak a fundamental rift in the material of the universe. The most likely explanation is that either Krypton's explosion or Kal-El's ship opened a rift into warp space that slowly healed itself.

The next problem we have is Kryptonite's radioactivity. It definitely emits radiation that is somehow lethal to Kryptonians, although we humans are supposedly unaffected by it. (But then again, we were supposedly unaffected by Red Dye #2 and saccharine.) K-radiation is most probably electromagnetic in nature, or there could be no such thing as a "K-laser"[4] and lead would be unable to dampen it. It is a fact of physics that if one subjects normal, stable matter to hard radiation, it will by no means become radioactive in itself. The only way for it to become radioactive is for it to be subjected to a process which changes its intra-atomic structure, that is, to change the number of protons or neutrons in its atomic nuclei. Such bombardment requires a colossal amount of energy.

This is further compounded by the fact that Kryptonite is not an Earthly element (not to be confused with the gas *krypton*, element 36), and is also reasonably stable —that is, it has a half-life measurable in years rather than in microseconds. The Periodic Table is all filled up through element 105 (hahnium), so the only possibility is that Kryptonite is an element with a higher atomic number. It is suspected, in theory at least, that there may be such elements, with atomic numbers about 114, that are fairly stable. Nevertheless, such transmutation of stable materials of the type with which we are familiar into super-trans-uranides would either require a large number of successive bombardments by high energy particles (which is impossible since the destruction of Krypton was a single explosion); or it would involve the fusion of heavy nuclei on a massive scale.

Perhaps the actual radioactive element in Kryptonite is minute, being mixed with large quantities of harmless, inert matter, whose structural and crystalline differences account for the many varieties of Kryptonite: green, red, gold, blue, white, and jewel. To have all the matter of Krypton, a planet much larger than Earth, turn radioactive would not only require the energy of an exploding galaxy, but would also turn the entire planet into high-energy plasma. In any case, it would make the survival of Argo City impossible.[5]

All in all, the explosion of Krypton was by no means the ordinary destruction of a planet. There are many possibilities to account for the conditions which caused the explosion to be so extraordinary, from the collision of the planet with a black hole to a complete rent in the fabric of spacetime. Clearly, no normal physical phenomenon, not even the supernova of Krypton's sun (which is impossible in the case of a red sun), could have resulted in the conditions which birthed Superman.

Next, let us consider Superman, the entity in himself. The official explanation has been that Superman's powers derive from Earth's yellow sun and lesser gravity. The yellow sun explanation seems logical, since a yellow sun is hotter, and therefore more energetic, than a red one. Probably there is some characteristic wavelength that the Sun emits which is not in the visible spectrum (since Superman's powers do not diminish at night) which grants him his major powers. These powers include: super-strength, super-speed, super-stamina, super-breath, invulnerability (not even radiation can penetrate his skin), certain visual powers such as heat vision (a synthesis of solar energy?), x-ray vision and telescopic vision,[6] super-hearing, the ability to negate mentally the force of gravity, and complete control of his body including its involuntary processes. Further, he needs neither rest nor food.[7]

It is noteworthy that Superman is often shown flying through interstellar space without utilizing space-warps.[8] In fact, Superman has even traveled through intergalactic space, where there is no known radiation other than the black-body radiation caused by the Big Bang. Apparently Superman retains his super-powers far from the emanations of a yellow sun as long as he avoids red suns that specifically jam his powers. If this were not the case, Superman would have to take along life-support mechanisms in the event he were to fly too far from a yellow sun.

4. Kryptonite-radiation has been shown to be transmitted in a ray via gun (*Jimmy Olsen* #133) and even as an ocular power possessed by the transformed super-ape, Titano (*Superman* #127).

5. The survival of Argo City was recounted in *Action* #252 (May 1959). No mention was made of how the city could survive a light speed explosion or conversion into kryptonite like the rest of the planetary fragments.

6. Superman's telescopic vision and superhearing would seem to be extra-sensory rather than sensory powers: see H. Broertjes' "Ethereality, Divergence, Diversifals" in *Omniverse* #1.

7. According to *Action* #409, Superman does not need to sleep,only to dream.

8. *Superman* #113, for example, has Superman traveling light years in split seconds with no evidence of any space warp.

Superman has been depicted as containing enough energy to be able to move even the Earth out of orbit.[9] This is obviously not a function of his strength, for he would need leverage in order to use his strength. It must be accomplished by his "anti-gravity" abilities then; he must be able to generate enough "anti-gravity" to counteract that of the Sun. If Superman drew his actual energy, the potential for accomplishing super-feats, from the energy output of the Sun, he could not do such a thing as move the Earth. This feat would exceed the amount of radiant energy a mass the size of his body could absorb in a lifetime, as well as exceed the total energy output of the Sun for the period of time the feat took! Hence Superman and the other surviving Kryptonians cannot be using the Sun as their storage battery.

The inescapable conclusion is that Superman himself is an enormous storehouse of energy. His body, while in the main impermeable and a perfect insulator and shield, is vulnerable only to certain wavelengths of electromagnetic radiation.[10] One wavelength is emitted characteristically by yellow G-type stars. It opens up channels for Kryptonians to utilize that vast energy. Thus are derived Superman's physical powers and his energy-visions. (His telescopic vision, along with his super-hearing, is probably a telepathic power which is independent of his other powers: as a rule, Superman can hear things far sooner than it would take for the sound waves to reach his ears, and can see things with such precision at such distances that it could not possibly be a mere optic ability.) As for his mental powers, such as intelligence and memory, these may be attributes of all Kryptonians and not related to stellar energy at all.

Another wavelength he is vulnerable to is that characteristic of red M-class suns. This wavelength shuts off his accessibility to his powers. It cannot be that the red solar radiation simply lacks the yellow solar wavelength, since then devices such as "red-sun guns"[11] would not work under the influence of a yellow sun. Red Solar radiation must somehow jam the yellow solar radiation.

Yet another wavelength to which Kryptonians are vulnerable is the Kryptonite band. Again, the effect that K-radiation has is to trigger a mechanism inside the Kryptonian which causes the weakening. If Green K poisoning were actually radiation poisoning, humans could not be exempt. As it is, however, K-radiation is mild enough that an Earthling can handle a Kryptonite meteor without burning his/her hands. In the case of Red K, the pattern for the transformation into whatever baroque effect it has probably also originates in the body of the Kryptonian itself. This is supported by the fact that the same effect never occurs twice; the body has accustomed itself to a specific pattern, has built up something akin to antibodies to it, and is no longer affected. Kryptonite is merely the radioactive catalyst for the change, not its actual cause.

How did such incredible storehouses and transformers of energy like the Kryptonians ever come to be? In light of our previous reasoning, our picture of life on Krypton is far removed from the traditional picture. First, Krypton was an incredibly radioactive planet. The rocks, buildings, plants, animals, and people were *all* radioactive. Although they managed to adapt and prosper, the situation was basically an unstable one. Superman's father, Jor-El, realized this and predicted with some accuracy Krypton's explosion (the rest is history). But how did such a radioactive planet ever come about? It cannot have been a long term phenomenon, since life would probably not have evolved on a planet with such a high radiation level. Also, if Krypton were actually radioactive at or near the time of its formation, its material would have decayed to stabler states over the intervening years. Hence, something must have made Krypton radioactive in the recent past (10 to 20,000 years ago).

Perhaps within this time-span a high-density, low-inertia black hole collided with Krypton. It plunged through the planet's crust, mantle, and core, and settled at the bottom of Krypton's gravity well, at the center of the planet. It slowly drew matter into itself and grew. In doing so, however, it disturbed the area beyond its Schwartzschild radius (the "point of no return") to such an extent that large amounts of radiation were released. This radiation soon permeated the planet. At first the reaction of life on the crust was to mutate drastically; hence the rather outlandish forms of Kryptonian flora and fauna. Later, as radiation levels increased, Kryptonian life began to find biological ways of storing energy and dealing with it. Ultimately, Kryptonians evolved into the powerhouses they are today.

The Guardians of the Universe were aware of this when they chose Kal-El as the embodiment of what was later the Green Lantern Corps: as one of the last babies born on Krypton before its death (and one with an extraordinary genetic history), he was the ultimate example of energy storage and utilization.

Eventually the black hole consumed itself. It has been shown that black holes, like all other bodies, are subject to the laws of quantum mechanics. And, just as an electron can escape a seemingly inescapable potential well by a phenomenon called "tunneling," so will a black hole disappear and release its matter back into the universe, if the hole is sufficiently small. In this case, the hole was small (less than a solar mass) and the release was sudden and violent. Krypton exploded.

We are still faced with the question of how Jimmy Olsen and other non-Kryptonians were able to visit such a planet without dying of radiation poisoning.[13] In Olsen's case, the fact that he time-traveled may have entered into his survival. Or perhaps his continual exposure to his buddy, the Man of Steel, may have somehow enabled him to build up a resistance. Along a related line, it does seem curious that it was only *after* Kal-El's arrival on Earth that other super-powered Earth beings originated, be it the Justice Society of Earth-Two or the Justice League of Earth-One. It causes one to speculate whether the Ultimate Energy Transformer from Krypton did not indeed have an indirect effect on certain Earth beings with latent potentialities. If the energy contained inside him has any effect on probability fields, any number of serendipitous accidents that have resulted in the transformation of human into super-human may be traced to the last Kryptonian. Superman may indeed be the grandfather of all superheroes. ■

ADDENDUM

World of Krypton #1 (July 1979) definitively corroborates the space-warp theory posited in this article.

9. Superman towed the Earth out of orbit most recently in *World's Finest* #208.
10. In *World's Finest* #207, Dr. Light learned that magic gives off "faint light energy" as it expends itself. In *Superman* #273, a scientist discovers that magic, like cosmic rays, travels in waves throughout the universe. Hence magic would seem to be just another wavelength phenomenon in the DC Multiverse. It has been suggested that magic may have a similar wavelength to kryptonite, to account for Superman's vulnerability to both.
11. Devices giving off red solar radiation have been used most recently in the Superman/Spider-Man and Superman/Muhammad Ali books.
12. *Superman* #257.
13. Jimmy Olsen visited Krypton in *Jimmy Olsen* #86.

WHO NEEDS COMICS WHEN THERE ARE SUPER-HEROES IN REAL LIFE?

by RICH MORRISSEY
art by MARK ALEXANDER

When they first appeared, comic books were little more than reprints of popular newspaper strips—sometimes augmented, when royalties proved prohibitive, by original strips whose creators wanted to make some money from them after they had been rejected by the syndicates. It wasn't until one such strip, Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster's *Superman*, became a spectacular success that comic books took off in their own right, and superheroes became a staple of the medium. The colorful, heroic fantasy of the superhero strip was ideal for the four-color publications, and although comic books did and still do feature other types of stories as well, superheroes remain the most popular of all. At least, that's how it happened in our own world.

But what would have been the fate of the comic books on a world where superheroes were *not* a new and unique type of fantasy, but existed in real life? Of course superheroes would appear in comic strips, and, by extension, in comic books too—but, not having originated in the latter medium as they did on Earth-Real, would they have done any more for it than cowboys, detectives, and other realistic characters did here? Possibly comic books would *never* have gotten beyond the stage of relying chiefly on newspaper reprints, and would now be as dead as their contemporaries, the pulp magazines.

And yet, consider the impact these superheroes originally had on the public. When Superman, Batman, Flash and Green Lantern first began to fight crime on the world we know today as Earth-Two, and the Human Torch and the Sub-Mariner began to battle above the skies of New York on Earth-M, and Captain Marvel and Ibis first appeared on Earth-S, and the people of Earth-X first began to hear of the unique and often bizarre exploits of Plastic Man and Uncle Sam and the Spirit—how often would their adventures be believed? For a time, at least, they would be relegated to what were then known as "Sunday-supplement" features—but such reports, even if scorned as fantasy at first, and not chronicled by the most accurate of writers and artists, might very well prove as ideal for the new medium of comic books as they did on Earth-Real. Other writers and publishers would counter with fictitious creations of their own, and by the time the superheroes' real existence became common knowledge, the comic books would have established themselves—and by this time, as on Earth-Real, even have official governmental support because of their anti-Nazi propaganda.

And, indeed, that's exactly what did happen on all the major Earths (with the possible exception of Earth-X), on which superheroes live, as we shall see. It is almost as if superheroes and comic books were meant to get together somehow, despite the wide variety, and variations from Earth to Earth, of those who really existed.

Earth-M provides an excellent example of how these comic books about real superheroes developed. In 1940, government officials still considered the Human Torch "a character out of the comic books" in *Captain America* #1, and the comics of those days, even after receiving official government approval, weren't accurate. *Invaders* #5 shows some of the real superheroes' comments on them, and their frequent inaccuracies—not putting stripes on Captain America's back, for example, although it has been established that he did have them from the beginning.

One thing that should be made clear at once, though, is that the *Captain America* comics on Earth-M were not identical to those on Earth-Real. Many have earnestly asked, "If there was a *Captain America* comic book on Earth-M, why couldn't his enemies have learned his secret identity by reading it?" Obviously comics about real-life heroes couldn't reveal their secrets if the writers didn't know them themselves—and even then, only in those rare cases when these "secrets" (as with The Spirit) weren't all that secret. Most such comics probably presented their heroes as mysterious figures whose identities were never revealed,[1] but a few definitely tried to use fictitious identities—The Mighty Destroyer's Earth-M series, for example.[2]

Earth-Two's *All-American Comics*, like Earth-Real's, featured a Green Lantern strip that definitely took the latter approach. It inspired two other people on that world to adopt secret identities of their own—Ted Grant's decision to become Wildcat is well known,[3] but the Green Lantern feature also inspired Mathilda Hunkel to adopt the identity of the original Red Tornado.[4] Both Mr. Grant and Mrs. Hunkel had talked to young readers who mentioned that Green Lantern was really "another guy"—but in neither case was that "guy's" name mentioned. Whatever secret identity an imaginative Earth-Two writer thought up, we can be sure it wasn't GL's real identity of Alan Scott—otherwise he would have had no end of trouble.

Earth-Two had a magazine called *Flash Comics*, too, which was mentioned in the aforementioned Wildcat origin—and several times by Johnny Thunder in his own

1. Much like the Black Orchid series in Earth-Real's *Adventure Comics* #428-430.
2. *Invaders* #18.
3. *Sensation* #1.
4. In the Scribbly story in Earth-Real's *All-American* #20.

strip. It was probably an authorized title like those on Earth-M, which dealt directly with some of the heroes—at one time Johnny actually complained to its editor for letting the other heroes intrude on his adventures, as if *he* had anything to say about it! One Boy Commandos story seemed to indicate that the Commandos had a similar arrangement with Earth-Two's Joe Simon and Jack Kirby, and the Justice Society of America often received letters "c/o *All-Star Comics*." Indeed, if we take the second page of the JSA's first story literally, we can conclude that Earth-Two had its own editions of just about *all* the DC Comics of the day—but here, as perhaps with the aforementioned Johnny Thunder story, it might be a mistake to accept everything at face value. After all, several other incidents in that story could hardly have happened in real life.[5]

5. For example, the members talking directly to the readers.

On Earth-S once again many of the statements regarding comics have to be taken with a grain of salt. It is definite that Earth-S did have comic books about Captain Marvel and other heroes, but those comics could hardly have revealed his secret identity, despite one story in which three other boys named Billy Batson (who were later to become the Lieutenant Marvels) apparently learned it from them. Perhaps the comics did mention Billy as a friend of Captain Marvel, and he told them his secret after meeting them.

As for Earth-X, there are very few references to comic books at all in the Quality stories I've seen—perhaps that was one world where comics hardly got beyond the newspaper reprint stage, and in any case were gone by the 1940s. The only superhero there who definitely had his own feature was The Spirit—and his publication, like its Earth-Real counterpart, was not a newsstand comic book but a newspaper supplement.[6] This supplement was another "authorized" presentation; several stories indicated it was produced through close collaboration between The Spirit and Earth-X's Will Eisner.

With the success of comic books about real superheroes, it wouldn't be long before fictitious heroes began to appear—considering the limited number of real heroes' adventures to chronicle and the fact that with fictional characters, the writers and readers could get closer to the heroes' private lives. However, not all of these were quite as fictitious as their writers realized.

On Earth-One, a world that as yet possessed only a handful of fringe superheroes,[7] a writer named Gardner Fox "created" a hero called The Flash, inspired by vivid dreams that, unknown to him, reflected actual events on Earth-Two.[8] Other references establish that the Gardner Fox of Earth-One was far from the only comic book writer to be inspired by events in other dimensions—though probably in most cases the inspiration came, not in the form of dreams, but as ordinary "flashes of insight" that came when a writer was pressed for an idea. Otherwise, there would surely have been more investigation as to the accuracy of such dreams. Few people on *any* Earth have had such a good and detailed imagination while asleep!

6. Very likely he never even had the reprint comic book he had on Earth-Real.
7. The Shadow, Zatara, The Avenger, Air Wave, etc.
8. *Flash* #123.

Flash Comics may well have been the first superhero comic to appear on Earth-One—it is very unlikely Earth-One ever had a *Superman* title, even one that did not reveal his identity, or someone would have remarked on it when Earth-One's Superboy made his debut in 1944.[9] The same, to a lesser extent, applies to Batman. However, we *do* know that Earth-One had an *All-Star* title featuring the Justice Society; Barry Allen had an old copy in *Flash* #137. Although Superman and Batman need not have appeared in it,[10] it could hardly have lasted for 55 issues without mentioning Hawkman or Wonder Woman—two other heroes whose Earth-One versions were too close to their JSA counterparts for comfort.[11] Nevertheless, the mere appearance of these two characters in *All-Star* would not necessarily have revealed any secret identities; alter egos are rarely mentioned in group comics even on Earth-Real. There's some evidence to support the proposition that Earth-One's Wonder Woman also made her debut during World War II.[12] If so, Gardner Fox could easily have rationalized her appearance in his dreams, and his publishers might well have gotten permission to include her in his JLA stories. Hawkman is harder to rationalize, but since his counterpart came to Earth-One after that world discovered Earth-Two's existence, there would have been no real confusion in his case—especially if Fox didn't write any solo stories of the Earth-Two character as his Earth-One counterpart did. We do know that the Earth-One *Flash Comics* did contain Johnny Thunder stories, though, as both Barry Allen and Earth-One's Johnny Thunder mentioned reading them in *Justice League* #37.[13]

9. There is conjecture that the Earth-One Superboy began his career in the 1950s rather than the 1940s, which would mean that Earth-One would not have a *Superboy* comic in 1944. See M. Gruenwald's "In Search of the Super-Sons Tangent" in *Omniverse* #1.
10. Even on Earth-Real, they very rarely appeared in that magazine.
11. Indeed, both Hawkman and Wonder Woman appeared on the cover of Barry Allen's copy of *All-Star* #37.
12. Perhaps some of the currently-chronicled World War II adventures do take place on Earth-One or its recent divergents, which would account for certain variations between the current series and Charles Moulton's original.
13. Whether they were by Gardner Fox or John Wentworth of Earth-One is impossible to determine.

Nor was Earth-Two the only world from which Earth-One's writers drew their inspiration. Other writers must have sensed the existence of Earth-S's Captain Marvel and chronicled some of his adventures at this time; a Rutland parader dressed as him in *Batman* #237, before Cap escaped the Suspendium globe in which he was imprisoned in 1953. Whether any Earth-One writer of the 1940s was tuned into Earth-M is hard to say, but other Rutland stories make it clear that at least one later one was. Indeed, if comedian Davey King's monologue in *Batman* #252 is truly accurate, at some time Earth-One's writers must have been tuned into just about all the worlds Earth-Real's writers have been![14]

None of the other Earths seemed to be quite as rich in "fictitious" heroes at the time; perhaps, as each has a full quota of real heroes, they did not need them as much. Earth-M also knew of Captain Marvel, and perhaps of Plastic Man, but there is nothing to indicate that any of its writers' minds ever reached Earth-Two—although some very definitely did draw inspiration from Earth-One when that world's heroic age began in earnest. And Earth-S must already have had its *Action Comics*; otherwise the title could never have reached #467 as it had in *Shazam* #30. But it may not have featured Superman in its early days; the Earth-One hero did not start his career until 1944, and the switch from one hero to the other that took place on Earth-Real was probably duplicated on few if any other Earths.[15]

Finally, at least some of the comic books on each Earth took place on worlds that have yet to be encountered. Earth-Two had *Geezer*[16] and *Eighth Wonder Comics*;[17] Earth-M had *Major Victory* (drawn heavily from Captain America's origin by Biljo White);[18] and Earth-One had *The Crusaders*, mentioned in *Freedom Fighters* #8. The fact that the Freedom Fighters also recognized the Crusaders indicates that their adventures were also chronicled on Earth-X as well as on Earth-One, and strongly suggests that the Crusaders really existed on some Earth—probably one in the same multiverse as Earth-M.[19]

Like the superheroes themselves, superhero comics went out of style at the end of the 1940s, probably even more totally and completely than they did on Earth-Real. The Nazi menace had been defeated,[20] heroes were retiring left and right, and suddenly writers everywhere, quite aside from decreased sales and new trends, could find no more inspiration for the stories that had once come so easily. The first heroic age was drawing to a close on Earth-X, Earth-Two, and (at least temporarily) Earth-M. It came to an abrupt halt on Earth-S when virtually all of its heroes were drawn into space and sealed into a sphere of Suspendium by Dr. Thaddeus Sivana.[21] The heroic age had not yet begun in earnest on Earth-One.

With the possible exception of Earth-S' *Action Comics*,[22] no superhero comic on any of the worlds under discussion with any basis in reality could have lasted through the 1950s at all. Little wonder that the comics that *did* survive went even farther in other directions than any we have seen, and at least one Earth-One critic was even more critical of horror comics than was our own Dr. Wertham.[23]

The comics were not forgotten, though—especially on Earth-One. In 1956 one of the great fans of *Flash Comics* and *All-Star*, Barry Allen, acquired super-speed powers and took the name of the Flash for his own. (In *Flash* #268 we finally got a chance to see the extent of Mr. Allen's collection.) In the two years since his high school graduation, Superboy, the local sensation of Smallville, had become Superman, world-famous hero of Metropolis, and Bruce Wayne's years of training had finally paid off as the criminals of Gotham City were suddenly confronted with that eerie creature of the night, the Batman.

And early in the next decade, Earth-M resumed its tradition of close collaboration between superheroes and comic book publishers when an experimental rocket's four passengers, exposed to cosmic rays, took on the powers and costumes of The Fantastic Four. They were quickly contacted by an enterprising writer and artist, Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, who wished to do an authorized comic book featuring their adventures. Within a year, people were waiting in lines to buy it.[24] Like its

14. In the Robin story, "The King From Canarsie," Davy King does his famous routine of saying superheroes' names in rhythm, including a good number of heroes who are not native to Earth-One.
15. Mr. Mind recognized Lex Luthor in *Shazam* #30, although he looked nothing at all like his red-haired Earth-Two counterpart.
16. Superman met *Geezer*'s creator, Henry Jones, in *Superman* #25. *Geezer* also featured a villainess named the Harlequin which indirectly inspired Molly Mayne in *All-American* #89.
17. One issue of *Eighth Wonder Comics* was produced entirely by Johnny Quick in *Adventure* #121.
18. Biljo White's Earth-One counterpart once belonged to the Scarecrow's gang, and his Earth-Real counterpart founded the fanzine *Batmania*.
19. Perhaps in a "comic book" distributed as a newspaper supplement like *The Spirit* sections on that world, but unquestionably as a regular newsstand comic on Earth-One.
20. Except on Earth-X, and there it may have temporarily receded into the background.
21. Sivana fortuitously fell into his own trap a moment later, according to *Shazam* #1, or else Earth-S might have suffered a worse fate than Earth-X.
22. Which may have featured the adventures of Earth-One's Superman since his Superboy days.
23. *Justice League* #144.
24. *Fantastic Four* #11.

Earth-Real counterpart, the outfit for which Lee and Kirby worked was called Marvel Comics,[25] and it realized when it had a good thing going. As more superheroes came into existence, Marvel was almost always the first to contact them and arrange to chronicle their adventures. Few of these new titles were as successful as their *Fantastic Four*; unlike the FF, most of the superheroes had private lives they didn't wish to reveal. And a hero like Nova, whose convoluted private life makes a book about him fairly successful on our own Earth, was rightly found to have very little in his active life going for him on Earth-M and rejected for that reason.[26] Nevertheless, the fact that these heroes really *exist* would certainly give their titles impressive sales; Nova's comment, "There just *isn't* any competition for Marvel,"[27] would be incredibly chauvinistic on Earth-Real but merely reflected plain fact on Earth-M.

Anyone on Earth-M who even wanted to *try* to compete would have to use something other than real life as a source. Once again, in some cases such people's subconscious minds tuned into other dimensions, and soon some Earth-One characters were appearing in Earth-M comics. They have appeared in convention and Rutland stories, and Peter Parker has been known to remark, in difficult situations, "This never happened to Clark Kent!"

Earth-One never seemed to have had the degree of cooperation between heroes and their comics as Earth-M did and does. Most of its comics about real life heroes are produced by writers and artists who research police files, such as "Rembrandt" Dickens in *Batman* #199. On the other hand, superheroes have made it into other media far more often on Earth-One; they don't seem to be as closely associated with comic books as they are on Earth-M. Batman had his own TV show in 1966[28] but so did Superman (who on Earth-Real had not had one since 1957) and even, briefly, Jimmy Olsen.[29] On Earth-Real, Superman has appeared on screen only in two low-budget serials, a short movie, and a multi-million dollar film, but on Earth-One, movies about him have been so frequent that actor Gregory Reed has made a regular career of the part.[30]

Superheroes and super-villains, both real and fictional, are frequent subjects of TV shows on Earth-One, such as the *Dazzler* series mentioned in *Green Lantern* #49.

And just as Earth-M's comic books have their fictional versions of some of Earth-One's heroes, so do Earth-One's seem to have their versions of Earth-M's—in a manner of speaking. In *Batman* #237 and other Rutland stories people have appeared dressed as Earth-M heroes—but under different names! Spider-Man, for example, is called Webslinger Lad. Possibly he, like the Crusaders, exists not on Earth-M but on some other world in the DC multiverse which was transitional to Earth-M—but more likely the Earth-One writer who presented the idea to his publisher was told to change the name. ("Spider-Man? Ridiculous—he's still a kid, for one thing!") This also explains (at least to the majority who agree that *Superman vs. Spider-Man* does not take place on Earth-One) the time Robin referred to a photographer named Peter Parker...

•••

On any Earth, nothing as unique and collectible as comics could have been around for over forty years without developing some sort of fandom. And, on both Earth-One and Earth-M (the only two on which we have enough information to discuss this particular subculture in any detail) an organized comic book fandom has indeed developed.

Of course, *superhero* fans and *comic* fans are not necessarily identical on a world where superheroes exist, but probably most superhero fans who are uninterested in fictitious heroes in comics are like most fans of real people (movie stars, athletes, etc.) on Earth-Real; their activities would be limited for the most part to pursuing the heroes or writing letters to them or reading seamy fan magazines (too widely distributed to be true "fanzines" as we know them) with speculative and unauthorized articles about them. The fans of the superhero *comics*, on the other hand, would be limited enough to do much the same sort of thing they do on Earth-Real—publishing fanzines, writing their own comics, and collecting and dealing in back issues.

From the beginning, there have been avid readers and collectors of comics. The aforementioned Barry Allen on Earth-One and Johnny Storm on Earth-M were great fans of the Flash and the Human Torch respectively; so much so that they took those names themselves when they acquired similar powers. Earth-M's Rick Jones was also an avid comic reader, but was not knowledgable enough about World War II history to know which superheroes actually existed and which were fictitious.[31]

But the first "active" fan on record was one Jerry Thomas, who went so far as to write and draw his own Justice League story, which he sent to the JLA itself.[32] Although they easily picked a hole in Jerry's basic premise, they were flattered by the attention—which indeed tended to be the reaction of most superheroes to the fandom that was beginning to develop.

The Rutland, Vermont Hallowe'en Parade, which under the direction of veteran fan Tom Fagan attracted many other fans in superhero costumes in years past, has its analogues on both Earth-One and Earth-M—parades in which, at least one year, the gap between the various Earths seemed to have been bridged.[33] It was probably the Earth-M version of Len Wein who figured in the 1972 saga; he and Marv Wolfman, like many other fans on Earth-M and Earth-Real, have become professionals at Marvel on Earth-M,[34] but on Earth-One Len, Marv, Roy Thomas, and Archie Goodwin are still fans.[35]

But fans do seem to be held in slightly higher regard on Earth-One and Earth-M than they are here on Earth-Real. After all, they often know not only professional comic writers and artists, but the superheroes themselves.[36] Little wonder that fan Tom Fagan, who has now lost all official connection with the Rutland Parade on our Earth, still has some say in it at least on Earth-One.[37]

Yes, indeed, one might ask what need there is for superhero comics when there are superheroes in real life—and on Earth-X, perhaps, the answer might well be "very little." But on Earth-Two, Earth-M, Earth-S, and Earth-One, fate has decreed differently—and comics truly seem to be there to stay on those Earths. At least until people here start waiting in line when a new *Fantastic Four* comes out, comics seem to have a rosier future on superheroic Earths than they do on our mundane world! ■

25. The evolution of Earth-M's Marvel Comics Group is astoundingly close to that on Earth-Real, according to *Fantastic Four* #176.
26. *Nova* #5.
27. *Ibid.*
28. Quite unlike the camp TV series on Earth-Real. As revealed in *Batman* #183, it was a "documentary about his greatest adventures."
29. All three series were mentioned in *Jimmy Olsen* #94.
30. The most recent Superman movie on Earth-One was being filmed in *Secret Society of Super-Villains* #7.
31. *Avengers* #97.
32. *Justice League* #16.
33. Namely in 1972, chronicled in *Justice League* #103/*Thor* #207/*Amazing Adventures* #16.
34. *Fantastic Four* #176.
35. *Freedom Fighters* #9.
36. Superheroes sometimes even show up at comic conventions, as in *Iron Man* #72 and *Detective* #465.
37. *Freedom Fighters* #6.

reality lines

Response to the premiere issue of Omniverse *has been so heavy that we could have filled our second issue with nothing but letters. It would seem that Fictional Reality is a provocative and encompassing topic that elicits creative discussion. We will use this space to present letters that foster further thinking about Fictional Reality in general, and the articles of the previous issue in particular. The editors of* Omniverse *would like to hear from you; after all, reality is a shared experience.*

MG/DM

DUCKBURG REVISITED

Re: "Howard the Duck Never Read the Duckburg Chronicle," by Bob Rodi. Although the description of Earth-Howard may be basically correct (I have not made such a study), the explanation of Earth-Disney(s) varies from mildly inaccurate to downright ignorant.

The first and most obvious thing to remember about Earth-Disney is that all beings are intelligent. Everything that moves, crawls, squeaks, or quacks has an innate knowledge of who and what it is. Given this, the application of labels to each biological group is interesting but somewhat trivial. Of the four outlined in the article, the last group—the animals akin to those on Earth-Real, *does not exist*! Billy Goat, on Grandma Duck's farm, is indeed very intelligent. When a coat of paint on a new weathervane does not agree with his taste buds, he promptly snorts (thought/action) "Bah to you, buster!" (*Grandma Duck's Farm Friends* #10). Now, some of the speaking citizens of Earth-Disney are sometimes not aware that the non-speaking residents are equally as intelligent as they. Donald Duck, trying to trap a kingfisher while in the employ of a fish hatchery, says to himself as the bird approaches the snare, "Here he comes, stupid and sassy! Just a dumb bird!" Needless to say, the bird triumphs, being neither stupid nor dumb (*Walt Disney's Comics and Stories* #192).

Indeed, language seems to be the only barrier that separates the citizens of Earth-Disney. Gyro Gearloose is frequently responsible for breaking this barrier. In *Walt Disney's Comics and Stories* #141, he places in a forest a pair of "think-boxes," an invention which he hopes will impart intelligent thought to any animal that passes between them. A rabbit transformed by the boxes' rays explains, "Yeah. Funny thing! Me and the missus took a walk down the path last night! Passed two funny boxes!" Until this transformation, this rabbit would fall into the last category outlined in the article. Yet, he knew it was night, knew he was on the path, and, of course, knew he was married. According to the article, his first intelligent act should have been passing between the boxes, not taking a nocturnal stroll with his spouse!

A second matter to remember is that there is no culture shock on Earth-Disney. If such a thing did exist, the very appearance of Mickey Mouse and Goofy in a city of humans in *Mickey Mouse* #107 would have been news in itself; the leader of Police International would not for a moment have considered an anthropomorphic rodent for an agent if such creatures were not already commonplace. Nor would the Big Bad Wolf be any particular example of "culture shock." Zeke Wolf's prime motivation is not to consume the Three Little Pigs; he merely enjoys terrorizing them. In *Walt Disney's Comics and Stories* #170, he actually catches the Three Little Pigs, but realizes that with the pigs gone he will have no one to chase, and lets them go to begin the game again.

The final concept to remember is that there is only *one* Disney Earth. Separate worlds where "movie" versions of stories take place are nonexistent. A character's "movie" life is part of that character's "real" life, and *all* lives coexist on the one Disney-Earth. In *Walt Disney's Comics and Stories* #113, Mickey Mouse dons a magic hat and utters a spell to disarm a mad bull. Asked how he knew that the hat was magical, Mickey proudly replied, "I once worked as a Sorcerer's Apprentice—and he had one just like it!" In *Walt Disney's Comics and Stories* #243, Chip and Dale find themselves trapped in an enlarged state, unable to remember the magic words taught them by Cinderella's Fairy Godmother. What to do? Why, they go to the theater in town where the movie *Cinderella* is playing, watch the part where the magic words are spoken, and use them to become small again!

Even a character's comic-book existence is part of Earth-Disney. Donald Duck and his nephew are seen reading comics in *Donald Duck Beach Party* #5, and the story contained in the issue they read turns out to be the adventure they themselves begin!

In spite of my contentions regarding these points, I hope you will continue to present articles like this one. Examinations of this type are rare; intelligent ones rarer still.

Albert Temple
Pittsburg, CA

MASS MOVEMENT

"Sizing Up the Microworlds" was an interesting discussion of the subject matter. The explanation of where Atom's mass goes, and why, was well-conceived, as the white dwarf star does indeed have such properties so as to render the conclusions postulated by Martin Berkenwald completely plausible.

Unfortunately, this fact also serves to make Martin's theories concerning Ant-Man rather shaky. Atom's and Ant-Man's powers resemble each other only in the most obvious superficial manner. Both their origins and abilities derive from completely different sources the one extraterrestrial and the other chemically-induced (since refined to a mental art). Because of these fundamental differences, it seems extremely unlikely that Pym and Palmer just happened to hit upon the same means of shedding their excess mass when shrinking. I admit the explanation fits neatly, but that's the trouble: it's just too neat, and too simple a way of resolving two dissimilar cases. If this explanation were accepted, we would *de facto* be acceding to the basic premise that all similarities in the abilities of different characters (notice that even Doll Man is accounted for in the article!) result from various manifestations of the same basic cause, of which there would be very few. If this principle were applied to other abilities, we could assume all characters with super-strength derived their powers from a similar source.

Also, since this theory discusses Hank Pym's mass, it should also account for where he *gets* his extra weight and mass when using the exact same mental abilities to increase his size. Rather than use the same cause for both characters, I could more easily swallow something along the following lines: Pym's original shrinking formula and endless mental changes have imbued his atoms with certain anti-grav properties which, when his atoms are compressed (shrinking), negate the effects of gravity to a great degree. Conversely, when Pym's atoms are diffused over a greater space (growing), they weigh more than when at normal dispersion (size).

Jim Lamb
Los Angeles, CA

PROFESSIONAL PRAISE

As one who's probably done more for/with/to the concept of parallel worlds than anyone in comics except Julius Schwartz and Mort Weisinger (in their different ways), I feel almost as if I helped bring *Omniverse* into being. The parallel-world concept, along with the "Marvel Universe" thing (a term coined first, incidentally, by fans, not by Stan or me), is naturally what created the need—and need there is!—for *Omniverse*. I've usually been more interested in telling a story than in solving every space/time paradox; still, I feel that coming to grips with the problems you bring up will simply result in still better stories and perhaps sew up a few of the admittedly ragged, frayed edges which have appeared on the fringes of the Marvel Universe these past few years, while all of us have been pursuing our own muses.

With so many zines coming out these days which seem more interested in baiting the pros than in making constructive suggestion, *Omniverse* is both a rarity and a fresh breeze. It's one of the very few zines I've seen in years which, if I were still a fan, I'd be interested in receiving or contributing to.

Roy Thomas
San Pedro, CA

THE LIVES OF DOCTOR DOOM

by FRANK LOVECE and WALT HELLSTROM

Doctor Doom, monarch of a nation; Rama-Tut, pharaoh of the Nile; Scarlet Centurion, ruler of an Earth; Kang, conqueror of the future; Immortus, master of time.

These are the men that try time's soul.

It has been hypothesized that these five persona are but one person, each a manifestation of the same being. There is evidence that they are indeed related: various aspects of their saga have been recounted often and by many. While the relative truth of certain facets is unquestionable, there are contradictions, perhaps even deceit, in the annals, a progression of secrets known only to Immortus, the most knowledgable of the purported chain. It is Immortus who, alone in his chamber, states, "Five lives have I known... Oh, that all might know what wonders there are to this firmament."[1]

Obviously, to have reached a point to muse on past lives, other lives had to have been. We will examine the known life histories of these five personalities to determine what relationships there may be, and how they might have come about.

VICTOR VON DOOM

Of the five personalities examined herein, Victor Von Doom is the only one whose birth and youth are documented, so it is here we shall begin. Von Doom was born in Europe sometime before World War II to Werner Von Doom, a gypsy healer, and Cynthia, a sorceress. Both Werner and Cynthia died during Victor's adolescence, and the boy was raised by Boris, the deputy leader of the gypsy tribe. Victor threw himself into study, learning from both the domestic science of his father and the mystic talismans contained in his mother's heirlooms. One of his early interests was robotics, and he perennially outwitted authorities with his automatons, apparently constructed with only the materials at hand and perhaps a touch of sorcery.

Von Doom's prowess with science and sorcery, coupled with his thirst for power, soon made him leader of his tribe. His reputation as a robot-builder even reached America, and prompted the dean of Empire State University to seek him out and offer him a scholarship. While in college, experimentation with "matter transmutation and dimensional warps" in an effort to contact his dead mother in the "Netherworld," caused an explosion which scarred his face, and caused him to be expelled. Despondent after the accident, Von Doom trekked through Tibet in search of "forbidden secrets of black magic and sorcery." He was discovered by a quasi-sorcerous sect, who taught him their lore and arts. In a short time, his teachers were calling him master, and he had them fashion him a suit of armor and a metal mask. This mask was "not completely cooled" when Von Doom first put it on.[2]

Returning to Latveria, the small country in the Bavarian Alps near which he had been born, the self-styled Doctor Doom overthrew Rudolfo, the lineal ruler of the tiny nation, and appointed himself absolute monarch. His appetite for power merely whetted, Doom began to devote his considerable genius towards one end: world mastery. Foremost among the many discoveries and inventions Doom made in his quest for power was a working para-Einsteinian time machine, by which he had access to the past and future.

When Doom learned that his college rival Reed Richards had gained cosmic powers, he perceived that Richards and his band of adventurers, the Fantastic Four, stood between him and his goal of world domination. Despite the proliferation of other super-powered altruists, Doom single-handedly concentrated his resources on the downfall of the Fantastic Four, largely to the exclusion of other, equally formidable opposition to his conquests. Although Doom's campaigns and setbacks have been numerous, the final episode of the man known as Victor Von Doom has yet to be chronicled.

RAMA-TUT

The first time the Fantastic Four met Doctor Doom, he used his time machine to dispatch them into the past to fetch the occult treasures of Merlin.[3] Some time later, the Fantastic Four first used Doom's time machine for their own purposes: to investigate the circumstances revealed in hieroglyphics of the apparent sight restoration of a blind pharaoh some 5000 years in the past.[4] They encountered Rama-Tut, who, to their surprise, spoke English and was familiar with them. Tut explained that he came from the year 3000 AD, an unbearably peaceful era for a man as adventurous as himself. Visiting the ruins of

1. *Avengers* #133, March 1975, p. 6.
2. *Fantastic Four Annual* #2, "The Fantastic Origin of Doctor Doom," 1964, p. 11.
3. *Fantastic Four* #5, July 1962.
4. *Fantastic Four* #19, October 1963.

AND TIMES OF DOOM

art by SAM DELA ROSA and BILL NEVILLE

an "amazing ancestor's" property (what looked to be a castle), the man who would be Tut came upon what was left of his ancestor's "greatest invention," a time machine, along with plans for its operation. Rebuilding the machine inside a sphinx, Tut traveled back to ancient Egypt with the intent to take over the greatest civilization of the time. Unfortunately, a miscalculation on his part resulted, he claimed, in damage to both his optic nerves and his time machine, blinding him and stranding him in the past. Although a rare herb supposedly restored his eyesight, he made no mention of how his damaged time machine suddenly became operative.

Suffering a minor defeat at the hands of the Fantastic Four, Rama-Tut set forth in his time machine for the era he claimed to come from. Pausing briefly in the 20th Century, Tut happened upon the drifting form of Doctor Doom, floating in the void of space near Jupiter.[5] Taking him aboard, Tut conjectured, "It cannot possibly be blind chance that we have met. It must be part of some grand design...some master plan of fate. For I, too, have good reason to hate the Fantastic Four. I, too, have been defeated by them."[6]

Tut explained to Doom that he came from the 25th Century (not the 31st, as he had told the Fantastic Four), and that he "committed crimes in many centuries using the time machine which I stole...which was supposed to have been invented by my ancestor, Doctor Doom."[7]

Doctor Doom hypothesized; "What if I am not your ancestor? What if I myself went to the future? What if you are me? What if Rama-Tut and Doctor Doom are the same man?"[8] Discussing how such an event could have occurred, the two simultaneously uttered, "But...if we're both the same man, how can we co-exist at the same moment in eternity?"[9] Unable to reach any conclusion, they turned their attention to their common goal, the defeat of the Fantastic Four. Doom advised against a joint campaign: "We dare not attack them together. If we are one and the same man, and if either of us is slain, then the other, too, will perish. For you cannot live in the future if you are slain in the past. And I cannot live in the present, if my other self dies at the same moment in eternity."[10] That Doom draws the conclusion that the demise of one of them will affect the other, while their simultaneous co-existence does not, may simply be an act of caution. While agreeing with Doom's suggested course of action, Tut contradicted Doom's assumption that Doom's death might affect him: "I shall bring you back to Earth, while I return to the future...so that I shall still live to carry on your fight even though *you* may be destroyed."[11]

SCARLET CENTURION

After transporting Doom back to Earth, Rama-Tut found that his craft had fallen prey to "electro-static disturbances in the relative timestream."[12] These disturbances may well have been what caused his timesphere to make a stopover in the 1960s in the first place. Apparently, Tut was stranded in this era for a while, so he decided to journey down to the Earth's surface in defiance of his pact with Doctor Doom, to try a new tack at conquering this elusive era.

Assuming the name and guise of the Scarlet Centurion, Tut appeared to the Avengers following their battle with the Space Phantom,[13] and claimed that he could solve all the ills of the human condition if the Avengers would agree to correct "a cosmic imbalance...caused by an excessive number of beings in your era possessing so-called super-powers."[14] The Avengers agreed to the Centurion's terms with reservations and proceeded to overpower and imprison all of Earth's superhumans, beginning with Tut's mortal enemies, the Fantastic Four. Even Doctor Doom is taken by the overzealous Avengers, a move that may have provided the Centurion with no small amusement.

A quintet of later Avengers, time-traveling via Doom's machine from a visit to 1945, inexplicably materialized in this alternate reality and set forth to disrupt the Centurion's plans. Against incredible odds, the new Avengers battled their founding members in order to reassemble the parts to Doom's time machine. In the final showdown, Henry Pym tampered with some of the machine's settings and created some sort of field preventing the Centurion from

5. *Fantastic Four Annual* #2, "The Final Victory of Doctor Doom," 1964, p. 4.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Avengers Annual* #2, 1968, p. 43.
13. *Avengers* #2, November 1963. Strict issue dating would indicate that Rama-Tut backtracked several months before becoming the Centurion.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

remaining tangible in that era. The new Avengers, too, faded from that reality, and found themselves in the world they knew, bereft of memory of the alternate world.[15]

That the reality of the present became alternate because of the Centurion's short-lived success is an often-overlooked facet of this chronology, one unnoted by the Watcher himself at the end of the chron-

icle. Barring the alternate Avengers' intervention there, the Scarlet Centurion could well have become the master of that 20th Century.[16] The Centurion should have learned from his near-success that a time traveler *can* succeed in altering the past; he is responsible for diverging an alternate reality from the Marvel mainstream, in which the Hulk remained with the Avengers.

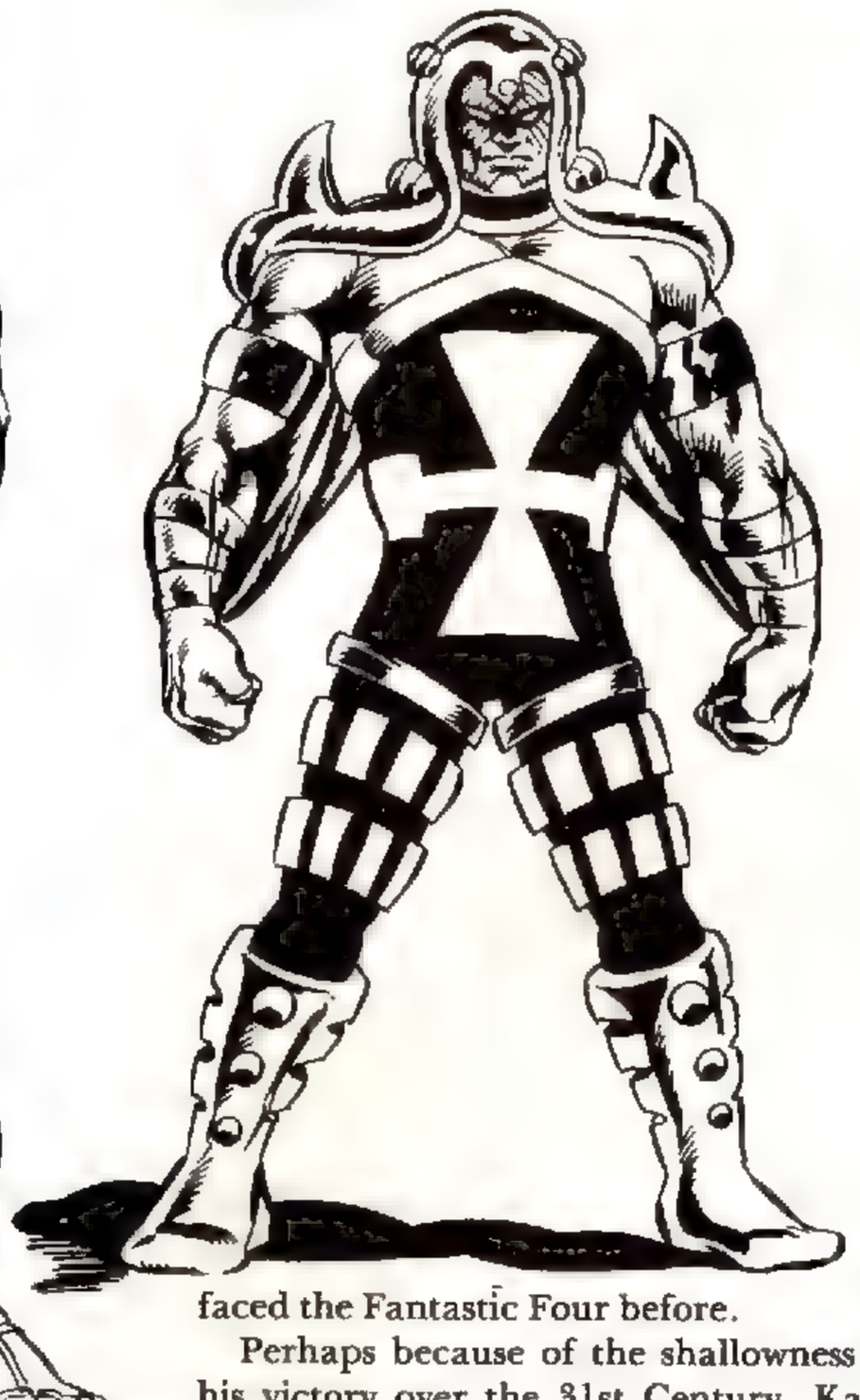
15. Apparently this memory loss was the handiwork of the Watcher.
16. An upcoming *What If?* depicts one version of what would have happened in this alternate reality had the time-travelers *not* mysteriously appeared.

KANG THE CONQUEROR

The Watcher reported the Scarlet Centurion's movements from this point. According to him, the Scarlet Centurion continued his journey to the year 4000 AD, and returned to battle the Avengers once more under his "50th Century name," Kang the Conqueror.[17]

At his first encounter with the Avengers in the guise of Kang,[18] he gave this account of himself: He was born in 3000 AD, he journeyed from that era into the past to

become Rama-Tut, his return to the era of his birth was disrupted by timestream disturbances, he met Doctor Doom, and he eventually located himself in the scientific-cum-barbaric Earth of 4000 AD. He claimed that it took but weeks to conquer and grow bored with this particular future Earth. Hence, it was but a short time after he assumed the guise of Kang that he renewed his attempts to conquer the 20th Century. Overcome by the Avengers in his first campaign, Kang escaped only to threaten them again a short while later with a robot of Spider-Man.[19] This scheme, too, was unsuccessful. His next strategem took him to medieval England, where he planned to take over King Arthur's Round Table in order to "change the past." Learning of Kang's plans, the Watcher dispatched the Fantastic Four's Human Torch and the Thing to thwart the conqueror. While the Watcher has always treated the Fantastic Four preferentially, it is interesting to note Kang's self-admission that his primary concern is "revenge upon my enemies in the 20th Century, enemies such as the Fantastic Four."[20] As Kang, he had never



faced the Fantastic Four before.

Perhaps because of the shallowness of his victory over the 31st Century, Kang permitted the native royalty to serve as his puppet rulers. Kang described the world which his puppets ruled as a "postage stamp kingdom," an interesting 20th Century colloquialism. Perhaps he permitted the royal family their figurehead rule because of his affection for the royal Princess Ravonna. From what has been shown of Kang's courtship of Ravonna, his ideas of chivalry and honor are decidedly archaic for a self-styled conqueror. Once, when he brought the Avengers to his era to do battle,[21] it developed that Kang had to ally himself with the Avengers to quell a

17. *Ibid.*, p. 44.
18. *Avengers* #8, September 1964.
19. *Avengers* #11, December 1964.
20. *Strange Tales* #134, July 1965, p. 3.
21. *Avengers* #23, 24, December 1965-January 1966.

civil war and rescue his beloved Ravonna. Defeating the enemy forces, Kang was robbed of his victory when Ravonna intercepted a traitor's ray-blast aimed for him.[22]

While the preceding events were taking place, Kang made a rather intriguing remark: "Doctor Doom! Little do they dream how closely related I am to the greatest arch-villain of all time." Although Kang referred to Doom as his ancestor on a single occasion,[23] it seems unusual to refer to an ancestor separated by at least a thousand years as "closely-related."

Kang returned to the 20th Century several more times for reasons relating to conquest. Once, he came back to check up on his stimuloid known as the Growing Man, which he built to combat "the forces who oppose me in my own world...in my own century...in the far distant future."[24] Thor banished Kang from the present with an "infinity vortex" created by his hammer, which placed Kang "beyond all time, beyond all place," a fair description of the transtemporal medium of Limbo.

This did not prove to be a real impediment to Kang, for he soon reappeared in his 31st Century world, where he became involved in an interdimensional chess game with the nigh-omnipotent Grandmaster, using the Avengers as pawns.[25] The stakes of the game were the power over life and death, should he win. Kang was victorious in all but one of the three rounds, and as his prize he was offered the choice of either the resuscitation of the comatose Ravonna, or the death of the Avengers. He chose the latter, his lust for revenge proving stronger than his love for the princess. Nevertheless, he was robbed of his revenge by the meddling Black Knight.

Kang's next appearance was a curiosity. His plan was a thinly-veiled reworking of the classic Grandfather Paradox, in which the Hulk was sent back to World War I to kill the Phantom Eagle, which would result in the death of Bruce (Hulk) Banner's grandfather, which in turn would diverge a reality without a Hulk. When the Hulk unwittingly thwarted Kang's scheme, Kang was mysteriously sucked into some sort of temporal vortex, and it was stated that "the man who once was Kang the Conqueror drifts, his mind a blank white page, in the Limbo between the millennia."[26] No mention was made in his next appearance of how Kang regained his mind after that defeat, leading one to suspect that that particular Kang had diverged from the previously-seen Kang at some point prior to or during that episode.

In Kang's next recorded appearance, he sent a robot of himself to conquer the 23rd Century ruled by Zarrko the Tomorrow Man, a ploy that inevitably drew the Avengers, the Inhumans, and Spider-Man into the melee. This scheme was as inspired as it was successful.[27]

22. Apparently Kang did not have sufficient mastery of time travel at this point to take a short hop backwards to prevent Ravonna's injury by diverging an alternate reality in which she didn't get hurt.
23. *Avengers* #24, p. 14.
24. *Thor* #140, May 1967, p. 15.
25. *Avengers* #69-71, October-December 1969.
26. *Hulk* #135, January 1971, p. 20.
27. *Marvel Team-Up* #9-11, May-July 1973.

Kang's journeys to the 20th Century reached their zenith and apparent culmination during his quest for the Celestial Madonna, a woman of the 20th Century who, it was said, would bear a child who would become the most important man on Earth. Kang was determined that he would be that child's father, and he undertook his most concerted military action ever to achieve that end. His first campaign involved trapping the three mightiest Avengers: Thor, Iron Man, and the Vision, inside "macrobots," automatons powered by the heroes' energies.[28] His second campaign involved drawing the Avengers to the catacombs beneath Immortus' castle in Limbo, there to battle the Legion of the Unliving—six formidable superhumans plucked out of recent history.[29] His third campaign relied on no allies other than himself, as Kang traveled to the 20th Century from four different times, so that he would have multiple counterparts to aid him.[30] In his fourth and final campaign, Kang set up a base of operations in 1873, apparently reasoning that by ruling the century prior to the Avengers' existence, he could rule the 20th Century, too.[31]

After the masterful plan of deploying multiple temporal counterparts in a single assault (whose major drawback was that Kang summoned a mere handful rather than the nearly endless number at his beckoning), Kang's 19th Century operation seemed very ill-conceived, reminiscent of his aborted campaign of Arthurian England. Kang should have known by then that even if he had conquered the 19th Century, he would have only succeeded in diverging an alternate reality, as the Scarlet Centurion had done, one that would not affect the Avengers' pre-existing reality in the least.

At the end of his last campaign, Kang was apparently destroyed when his uniform's temporal circuitry was damaged, dispersing his atoms throughout time.[32]

RAMA-TUT II

Reports of the chain's undoing to the contrary, the progression of counterparts does not end with the discorporation of a Kang in 1873. One of the temporally divergent counterparts that survived the Celestial Madonna affair went back to the 31st Century, there to dwell on the comatose Ravonna, who seemed forever out of grasp. He reflected, "As my sixtieth year crept upon me, I realized the void I had made of my life. Conquest was a drug—stimulating only for a time—and in the end, I woke up alone. I vowed to retire from the field. So I left the 41st Century, with its royal city built on sand, and returned to a happier time. Once more in ancient Egypt,...I smashed my time-sphere and returned to my people as Pharaoh Rama-Tut. I ruled them well, with the virtue I formerly loathed the most: compassion. At seventy, I finally felt fulfilled."[33]

After ruling the Egyptians for ten years, the second Rama-Tut began to regret his life as Kang: "As Kang, I had wasted my life in fruitless warfare—the most fruitless of which was my assault on the Celestial Madonna. I had no choice but to reach forward 5000 years, to the 20th Century—and enter my own past!"[34] No longer possessing a working time machine, Tut planned to use suspended animation to traverse the millennia without aging, and with the aid of his court wizard, he undertook the journey. Tut arranged for himself to be awakened when the Avengers' Swordsman stumbled upon his tomb, a circumstance which he claimed to remember as happening from his days as Kang. During Kang's first conquest of the Celestial Madonna, Tut fought his counterpart, and the struggle ended with the two of them vanishing into Limbo. It is interesting to consider the extent of Rama-Tut's memory of this twice-seen encounter. While certain events occurred as Tut remembered they would (e.g., the Swordsman's trip to his tomb), the very resolution of the conflict, where the two combatants slip into Limbo, does not seem to.

In Limbo, the two counterparts were drawn to the castle of Immortus, the self-styled master of time.[35] Immortus seemed to be drawn into Kang's machinations; after summoning the Legion of the Unliving, Immortus was imprisoned by Kang in a capsule of his own devising.

IMMORTUS

His participation in the Celestial Madonna affair marked the second appearance of the man called Immortus. His first occurred early in the Avengers' career, when he mentally contacted the Asgardian Enchantress to offer to aid her and the Masters of Evil against the Avengers. "One day I shall claim this century," he told them, "and I may permit you to serve as my underlings."[36] The nature of Immortus' actions in this episode are curious. Abducting honorary Avenger Rick Jones, Immortus tried to turn Captain America against his fellow members. Failing in that, he summoned such legendary figures from the past as Goliath, Merlin, and Hercules, to battle the Avengers. When that too failed, Immortus disappeared with Captain America, allowed him to rescue Rick Jones, and returned them to their own time. To avoid capture by the Avengers, the Enchantress cast a spell to send her and the Masters of Evil back in time to

28. *Avengers* #129-*Giant-Size Avengers* #2, November 1974.
29. *Avengers* #131, 132, *Giant-Size Avengers* #3, January-February 1975.
30. *Giant-Size Avengers* #4, June 1975.
31. *Avengers* #141-143, November 1975-January 1976.
32. *Avengers* #143.
33. *Giant-Size Avengers* #2, p. 14.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
35. *Avengers* #131.
36. *Avengers* #10, November 1964, p. 4.

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the moment when Immortus first contacted her. This time she broke contact with him, averting the chronicled events by creating a divergence.[37] Apparently, this rudimentary time trick worked, for they heard no more from the master of time. Immortus did not seem to be very masterful at this outing, nor were his motives fathomable.

During his involvement in the second campaign for the Celestial Madonna, Immortus' actions again were opaque, bearing little continuity with his previously recorded deeds. At first he seemed to ally himself with Kang, providing him the means to summon the Legion of the Unliving. But when Kang imprisoned him with Rama-Tut, Immortus genuinely acted as if he had been outwitted. Only later do all these occurrences seem part of a grand design. Design or not, Kang escaped from Limbo and the Unliving Legion fiasco to plot anew. When Rama-Tut left for parts unknown, Immortus revealed to the Avengers: "Immortus himself is but another manifestation of both Kang and Rama-Tut here in a nameless Limbo and future of which even Rama-Tut was unaware."[38] Later he explained how Rama-Tut became him: after failing to stop Kang from wasting endless years in conquest, Rama-Tut became despondent. "It came to him that despite his excellent intentions, his quest to undo the wrongs he had wrought as Kang only resulted in the conqueror's strengthening. Thus, after returning from my land of Limbo to his Egypt, he devoted himself entirely to a further understanding of time to become its final master—myself."[39]

37. It is curious that the Enchantress and crew did not meet themselves doubling back on their own tracks in time as they did. Perhaps Immortus maneuvered them so they wouldn't, for reasons that will be described later in this text.
38. *Giant-Size Avengers* #3, p. 39.
39. *Avengers* #143, p. 31.

Following the Avengers' adventure in Immortus' castle, the master of time enabled the Vision and Mantis to witness their forgotten pasts. At the end of those journeys, Kang made his third attempt at the Celestial Madonna (now revealed to be Mantis), but Immortus tricked Kang into abducting the body-changing Space Phantom in her stead. Officiating at the weddings of the Vision and the Scarlet Witch, and Mantis and the Cotati, Immortus returned to Limbo, apparently unperturbed that Kang was still on the loose.

When Kang next appeared, attempting to conquer the 19th Century, Moondragon mentally contacted Immortus through the mists of Limbo, to ask for his aid in locating Kang.[40] Guiding them to the American frontier, Immortus played no part in the final battle with Kang. Kang was defeated in battle with Thor when an overload of temporal energies dispersed his atoms throughout eternity. Only then did the visage of Immortus reappear, to proclaim to Thor and Moondragon, "...Since the day I took this name, I have worked subtly but unceasingly to bring about an ending to this menace we [he and his counterparts] unleashed. Now, Kang no longer exists, and Rama-Tut shall never come into being. Neither too shall Immortus have been. The circle is broken. We are all free."[41] With that pronouncement, Immortus vanished, leaving Moondragon to bemoan that there was one less god.

40. Moondragon said she was able to contact him since she "learned his brain patterns." It seems odd that Thor didn't just use his hammer's time-travel capacities here.

Immortus' last words turned out to be yet another deception, and it is curious that Thor and Moondragon accepted his claim to un-being so readily.[42] For one thing, they should have realized that the absence of Immortus and Rama-Tut II would have made significant retroactive differences in their recent bouts with Kang, differences they could verify through memory that did not exist. For another, the fact that the Avengers fought multiple Kangs in his third campaign, and that these Kangs were subject to divergent fates (three were captured, one escaped), should also have tipped them off that counterparts are not bound by their fellows' fates.

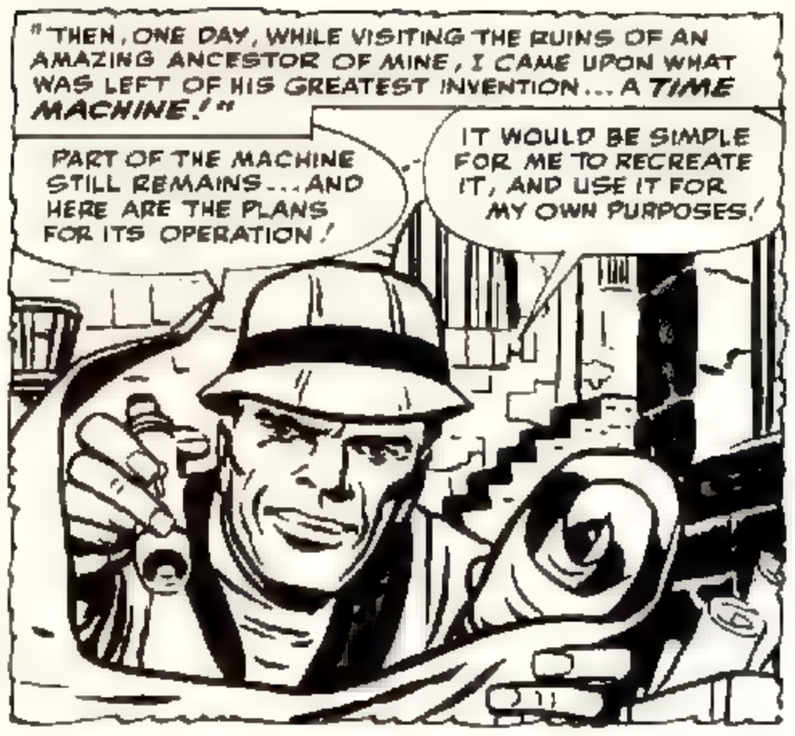
It is Thor alone who learned of Immortus' survival and mysteries while journeying sometime later through Limbo. Again, Immortus' methods were oblique: instead of simply asking Thor for permission to study his hammer's time-traveling properties, he employed the Space Phantom to detain the Asgardian while he conducted his experiments. By the time Thor tracked down Immortus, the master of time had learned the nature of the hammer's magic enchantment, and Immortus maneuvered Thor into voluntarily sacrificing the hammer's time-travel capacity.[43]

In recompense for Thor's inconvenience, Immortus gave him the most sweeping account of his origins yet, speaking of the transition between Rama-Tut II and himself:

"In the twilight of my Earthly years, I decided to thwart death's impending embrace by sequestering myself in ageless Limbo. Here for eternity, I would further my studies of time. I built a wondrous castle in which to dwell—built with stone and laborers salvaged from the broken dreams of a former life. Donning my final regalia, I took two subjects...Tempus, who I fashioned from the very ether of Limbo to guard my domain, and the Space Phantom, who destiny delivered to me..."[44]

Immortus also spoke of his cryptic first meeting with the Avengers, revealing that the purpose of his alliance with the Masters of Evil was to learn what effect Kang had on their early development. It seems curious that Immortus would mention this

41. *Avengers* #143, p. 31.
42. Apparently Immortus wiped Moondragon's mind of her knowledge of his brain patterns.
43. *Thor* #281, 282, March-April 1979.
44. *Thor* #282, p. 26.


"THEN, ONE DAY, WHILE VISITING THE RUINS OF AN AMAZING ANCESTOR OF MINE, I CAME UPON WHAT WAS LEFT OF HIS GREATEST INVENTION... A TIME MACHINE!"
PART OF THE MACHINE STILL REMAINS... AND HERE ARE THE PLANS FOR ITS OPERATION!
IT WOULD BE SIMPLE FOR ME TO RECREATE IT, AND USE IT FOR MY OWN PURPOSES!

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episode, since it occurred to a divergent Thor, not the one he was addressing. Perhaps Immortus intended the anecdote to illustrate his purely clinical interest. In all probability, Immortus' real purpose in the Masters of Evil affair was to establish his credibility as a villain for an observing Kang, in order to set Kang up for their later "alliance."

Immortus continued his account: "Some time thereafter, I had my first visitation from a trinity of beings spawned at this time-cycle's end. They claimed to have culled me from the ranks of time travelers to be tutored in the secrets of time so I might help them in their custodianship of the timestream."[45] This trinity of beings, heretofore unglimpsed in the annals, are a new factor in the equation of time. Immortus revealed that "as their apprentice, I was assigned to oversee the seven millennia in which I had lived. My task was to monitor all time travel therein and to untangle the multiplicities I had created in former lives. The Celestial Madonna affair was but one of many campaigns I undertook to curtail my renegade counterparts throughout the multiverse."[46]

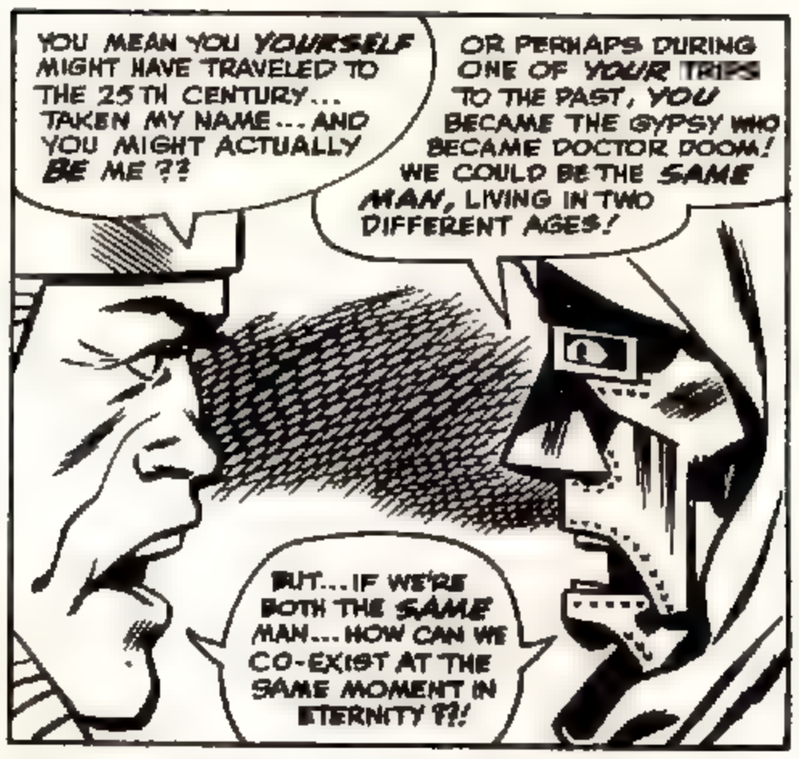
Immortus' revelation that the Celestial Madonna quest was not a major turning point in his life, but merely one of many police actions he has been involved with, is ripe with implications. First, it establishes why Immortus may have let Kang escape through time twice, only to wreak havoc anew: Immortus had other irons in the fire at the time, equally important. Second, it indicates that despite one Kang's death, there exist other divergent counterparts —perhaps even Kangs—who still continue on their unenlightened paths, creating problems for Immortus and the Realities they plunder. Whether one of these counterparts will find the Reality we know as Marvel-Earth remains to be seen. Immortus explained the reason for his deception when last Thor saw him was to reassure him that the *immediate* threat of Kang was over.

Immortus ended his address with a clarification of the relationship of his divergent selves: "The death of one counterpart does not affect the lives of the rest of my legion of temporal counterparts one iota. The tree of my existence is ever-growing, and once having been, always is."[47] Immortus is immortal, after all.

CORRELATIONS

Immortus spoke of both his ever-growing legion of temporal counterparts, and that he has known but five lives. How can these two seemingly contradictory statements be reconciled? Given our knowledge of divergence, the matter is simple: though Immortus is the culmination of five personae, he is not the only possible direction divergences could take. Any of the four personae who became Immortus could have diverged at any point down the line to culminate in something other than Immortus. We have already seen at least one counterpart who did not become Immortus, whose life reached a dead end—the Kang who disintegrated in 1873. That particular Kang diverged at some point from the Kang who would become Rama-Tut II and then Immortus.

In Immortus' metaphor of the tree of his existence, only one sequence of branches extends to the very height of the tree. While that sequence of five main branches grows in height, the rest of the tree grows in breadth, despite occasional pruning of


YOU MEAN YOU YOURSELF MIGHT HAVE TRAVELED TO THE 25TH CENTURY... TAKEN MY NAME... AND YOU MIGHT ACTUALLY BE ME??
OR PERHAPS DURING ONE OF YOUR TRIPS TO THE PAST, YOU BECAME THE GYPSY WHO BECAME DOCTOR DOOM! WE COULD BE THE SAME MAN, LIVING IN TWO DIFFERENT AGES!
BUT... IF WE'RE BOTH THE SAME MAN... HOW CAN WE CO-EXIST AT THE SAME MOMENT IN ETERNITY??!

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crooked branches. As the highest reach of the tree, Immortus has been given charge of the whole, overseeing its nurture.

Thus, only one specific progression of personae becomes Immortus, but personae branching off at earlier points may atrophy or culminate in other guises.[48] Immortus stated that he has also taken responsibility for those selves he has never been but could have become through other permutations of divergences.

It is now apparent why Rama-Tut II knew some of Kang's future, but not all. At some point, his actions or reactions differed from those he remembered as having occurred to him as Kang, and the difference was enough to diverge a Kang that would not become him. Perhaps one of the reasons why Immortus wanted to deal with his counterparts as indirectly as possible was to prevent the divergences that are so likely when counterparts meet.[49]

Having established how Immortus may have an ever-growing legion of counterparts, let us now examine simply the ones in the progression to Immortus. The Rama-Tut/Scarlet Centurion/Kang/Rama-

45. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
46. This raises the theoretical question of whether it is possible for Immortus to truly make a difference in the number of wayward counterparts he has, or if his task of "untangling multiplicities" is a quixotic one. If every time Immortus acts to thwart a counterpart, he creates a divergence (one Reality where he succeeded in permanently correcting or eliminating a "bad" self, another where he failed), would he be able to affect the ratio of "good" to "bad" counterparts, or would he be constantly undone by a reciprocal counterpart coming into existence through divergence? If Immortus is Omniversally aware (as he seems), does he not know that he cannot stymie divergence, or have the trinity of time-beings given him the secret of "divergence-free interference," something not yet described by the Omniversal Theory?
47. *Ibid.*
48. Some theorists suggest, for example, that Victor Von Doom's frequent association with the Sub-Mariner may have led him to travel to pre-cataclysmic Atlantis, there to establish himself as the sorcerer Thulsa Doom. This would be a path that does not culminate in Immortus.
49. Again, this is assuming that Immortus is able to make divergence-free interferences under special circumstances.

"SOME TIME THEREAFTER, I HAD MY FIRST VISITATION BY A TRINITY OF BEINGS SPAWNED AT THIS TIME-CYCLE'S END.
"THEY CLAIMED TO HAVE CULLED ME FROM THE RANKS OF TIME TRAVELERS TO BE TUTORED IN THE SECRETS OF TIME... SO THAT I MIGHT HELP THEM IN THEIR CUSTODIANSHIP OF THE TIME-STREAM.
"I LAUGH WHEN I COMPARE THE MEAGER KNOWLEDGE I AMASSED IN FIVE LIFE-TIMES WITH THE KNOWLEDGE OF ETERNITY THEY IMPARTED.

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"AS THEIR APPRENTICE, I WAS ASSIGNED TO OVERSEE THE SEVEN MILLENNIA IN WHICH I HAD LIVED. MY TASK WAS TO MONITOR ALL TIME TRAVEL THEREIN AND TO UNTANGLE THE MULTIPLICITIES I CREATED IN FORMER LIVES.
"THE CELESTIAL MADONNA AFFAIR" WAS BUT ONE OF MANY CAMPAIGNS I UNDERTOOK TO CURTAIL MY RENEGADE COUNTERPARTS THROUGHOUT THE MULTIVERSE.
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Tut II/Immortus chain has been documented and corroborated as representing four of the different personae of Immortus' claim of "five lives." Yet, no persona, not even Immortus, has definitively spoken of the missing root persona. The evidence that it is Victor Von Doom is extensive but circumstantial, with many facets unexplained.

Victor Von Doom is the only one of the personae whose parentage and childhood have been depicted. The only other figure who makes any claim of actual birth is Kang, but as Rama-Tut he merely claims to be "from" the future, not born in it. When Doom and Tut have their classic first confrontation, Tut claimed Doom was his ancestor, but it was Doom who first framed the hypothesis that they could be the same man. Tut suggested that Doom could have traveled to the 25th Century to become him; Doom suggested that Tut could have traveled to the 20th Century to become *him*. However, since we have seen *Doom* as a child, not Tut, and since we are assuming that we are working with a natural chronological progression in which no one mysteriously becomes younger, Tut's theory of Doom coming first seems more plausible. One wishes the two would have compared childhood memories or lack thereof.

Centuries of origin, if not necessarily birth, provided by the personae of Rama-Tut and Kang differ in various accounts. In Rama-Tut's first encounter with the Fantastic Four, he claims to come from the year 3000 AD (i.e., the 31st Century) just as Kang told the Avengers in their first encounter. However, Rama-Tut claimed to Doctor Doom that he was from the 25th Century, not the 31st, the same ploy that Kang told Merlin before his encounter with the Thing and the Human Torch. It seems almost like a rehearsed deception. Further, the reputedly all-seeing Watcher reported that the Scarlet Centurion "helplessly continues his journey into the year 4000 [the 41st Century] ... 'Tis written that he returned to battle the Avengers once more under his 50th-Century name of Kang the Conqueror."[50] One wonders where " 'tis written" that a being based in the 41st Century is known under his 50th Century name. The 50th Century may simply be one of the many centuries that Kang has conquered.

It is Immortus who sheds the most light on the subject of which century the chain of personae originated in. Speaking of his first appearance to the Avengers, he remarked that he began his studies of time with the era in which he originated.[51] Though we can conclude that it is the 20th Century in which he originated, that alone is not proof that Victor Von Doom is the first persona.

Let us look at some commonalities that exist between Doom and the others, to see if any patterns emerge.

The biggest similarity among the five is their thirst for power. Each has been ruler of an increasingly greater domain. For Doom, it was the tiny mountain kingdom of Latveria; for Tut, it was all of ancient Egypt; for the Centurion, it was 20th Century Earth; for Kang, it was rule over several centuries; and for Immortus, it was mastery over Limbo. Yet there are other conquerors, others who seek mastery over men, who are not in the progression.

Most of the counterparts share Doom's penchant for the trappings of royalty. Kang and Immortus have castles, similar in architecture to Doom's, as does Rama-Tut's "amazing ancestor." Tut himself has the equivalent of a castle in his Egyptian temple. Immortus' castle, seeming to encompass an entire planetoid, was "salvaged from the broken dreams of a former life,"[52] which may simply be a reference to Kang's castle. However, the laborers who constructed Immortus' abode look more like Doom's servo-bots than any of the automatons of Kang's design.

Doom, Kang, and Immortus not only build robots to serve them (Immortus' servant, Tempus, is conceptually a robot; instead of being built of metal, he was fashioned from the ether), they are also elaborate games-players. Doom built a robot called the Prime Mover for the express purpose of gaming, and is notorious for his manipulation of people like pawns. Kang, too, displayed his bent for gamesmanship when he took up the challenge of the nigh-omnipotent Grandmaster. Immortus is perhaps the biggest gamesman of the three, utilizing elaborate deceptions and ploys to unwittingly coerce others to do his bidding.

Doctor Doom, the Scarlet Centurion, and Kang all possess force fields built into the circuitry of their armor. All three hide their faces behind helmets.

Doom and Kang have the greatest number of commonalities. Besides those already listed, both have strikingly similar *objets d'amour*, Valeria and Ravonna, both have domains they describe as "postage stamp kingdoms," both have fanatical obsessions with a single 20th Century superhero team: Doom with the Fantastic Four, Kang with the Avengers. Kang's seeming confusion in referring to his "20th Century enemies such as the Fantastic Four" does not seem quite as misleading in this comparative context.

Finally, the similarity that is at the root of this multiple personae problem: all three are time-travelers. This, in itself, is not proof of interrelationship. There are other known time travelers in the annals, the best-known of which are Zarrko the Tomorrow Man of the 21st Century; Sise-Neg, the 31st Century sorcerer, and

THIS IS THE NUTTIEST DECISION YOU'VE MADE YET, WING-HEAD! NEXT THING WE KNOW, YOU'LL BE SWEARING IN DOCTOR DOOM!
DOCTOR DOOM! LITTLE DO THEY DREAM HOW CLOSELY RELATED I AM TO THE GREATEST ARCH-VILLAIN OF ALL TIME! BUT, THERE IS NO TIME FOR THAT NOW--!
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50. *Avengers Annual* #2, p. 43.
51. *Thor* #282, p. 26.
52. *Ibid.*

HAVE YOU NOT GUESSED-- AS RAMA-TUT DID--AS I AM SURE SEVERAL OF THE AVENGERS HAVE?
IMMORTUS HIMSELF IS BUT ANOTHER MANIFESTATION OF BOTH KANG--AND OF RAMA-TUT--
--HERE, IN A NAMELESS LIMBO AND FUTURE OF WHICH EVEN RAMA-TUT WAS UNAWARE!
THIS IS ALL BEYOND ME!
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Reed Richards of the Fantastic Four, who duplicated Doom's own time machine. Of these individuals, not enough is known to definitely include or exclude them from counterpart consideration. Sise-Neg's origins are unknown, but his magical proclivity is certainly similar to Doom's. Zarrko has battled Kang on at least one occasion for supremacy over his own century. Reed Richards' origins are also unknown (we have yet to learn of his parentage and childhood), but he does seem to share with Doom what Immortus claimed was his "originating era," the 20th Century. Still, Richards' personality orientation and idiosyncracies have so little in common with those of the other known counterparts, that there is virtually nothing to substantiate him as the first persona from which the others sprang.[53]

We are still left with a puzzle or two in our conjecture that Victor Von Doom is the root persona in the progression to Immortus. The first of these is, if Doom wears a mask to conceal some facial disfigurement, why doesn't the next persona, Rama-Tut?

Doom's naked face has not been shown since the time of his accident decades ago. Although a handful of people have seen Doom unmasked, none has ventured a real description. Despite the original account's statement that the explosion left Doom "hideously disfigured," some theorists have proposed that Doom's face is not as ravaged as he would make it out to be. Rather, Doom is but slightly scarred, and it is his enormous ego that magnifies his imperfection.[54]

Whatever the extent of his ugliness, Doom seems to be moving toward a greater acceptance of his appearance. While there was a time when he would not allow his closest associates to see his face, lately he has permitted his greatest enemies casual looks. Whether his face is a mass of scar tissue or is only pallid from years beneath a stifling metal mask, Doom seems to be learning to cope with his physical imperfection. It is no great stretch of the imagination to envision a time when, under the right circumstances, Doom might be able to discard the psychological crutch of his mask.[55]

Even if his deformity is real, it is probable that by the time of Rama-Tut, science will have advanced to the point where any sort of cosmetic repairwork would be possible. This would also explain why Doom could remove his mask when assuming a new identity. However, with the assumption of the third persona, Scarlet Centurion, we must postulate a new reason for Doom's resumed preference for concealing his features.

The final question to consider before the lifelines of the four personae can be interwoven with Doom's is, are the four later counterparts aware of the identity of the root persona? If so, why have they been so reluctant to disclose it? Has some uninvited trick of time robbed them of knowledge of their true origins, or is their limited comprehension a part of an unseen design?

Let us suppose that Rama-Tut did know that he was Doctor Doom at the time of their first meeting. What motive might Tut have in giving Doom the notion that they are mere ancestors, letting *him* frame the hypothesis that they are closer than ancestors, they are the same being? Could Tut have been leading Doom on to make a self-fulfilling prophesy, or might he actually have been trying to dissuade Doom from trying to become him by making him ponder his free will in deciding his destiny? Although there were any number of tests the two could have used to determine their relationship (from comparing fingerprints to searching for Tut's first appearance in the 25th Century), neither Doom nor Tut seemed curious enough to resolve the matter.

Now let us suppose that Rama-Tut did not know he was Doctor Doom at their first meeting, that he thought he was indeed Doom's ancestor. How might he have lost the knowledge of his former identity? Time travel in itself does not play memory tricks on the traveler, but "rough landings," as it were, could always be concussive enough to cause selective amnesia. But since we are dealing with an identity confusion that prevailed over decades of chronological life, accidental amnesia seems improbable. Self-hypnosis seems a bit more plausible, although a motive for eradicating knowledge of his past life would have to be found. Perhaps the least contrived explanation would be that one persona is manipulating the memories (if not the lives) of his other selves. The likely candidate for this, of course, would be Immortus, the most advanced persona of the chain. Perhaps Immortus has been manipulating his counterparts' memories in keeping with his mentors' directive to untangle the multiplicities he created in former lives. Or, perhaps Immortus' ends are not as noble as he would have us believe. What if his real reason to obfuscate the lives of his legion of counterparts is to ensure that none of them advances to his level of enlightenment, so that he remains sole master of time? Only *one* of Doom's legion of counterparts who diverged through time travel need become Immortus, after all.

Any of these scenarios will account for the haziness of the transition between the root and later personae. Only time will tell which one, if any, is valid.

The progression of personae from the peasant Victor Von Doom to the master of time Immortus is a journey towards self-mastery and enlightenment. Is this process a random occurrence, or is it guided by some unseen hand? In a multiverse of actualized probabilities, virtually every permutation of character could reach fruition, given the divergence-potential of a time machine. But what then of the "trinity of beings spawned at this time-cycle's end" that Immortus speaks of, those shadowy figures who "culled him from the ranks of time travelers to help them in their custodianship of the timestream"? Could they have picked the man who would be Immortus at birth and groomed him over the years to be precisely the man for the task?

The skein of probabilities surrounding Victor Von Doom and his projected selves is among the most fascinating and pervasive in the Marvel Multiverse. Spanning over seven millennia, the possibility for character evolution is endless. Perhaps when more is known, it shall be said that Victor Von Doom is not only the most fascinating individual of the 20th Century's Superheroic Age, he is also the all-time champion of self-realization. ■

53. For another thing, Richards does not seem likely to own a castle which Rama-Tut can discover his "ancestor's" time machine in.

54. In *Thor* #183, Doctor Doom revealed his face to surgeon Dr. Donald Blake in hopes that cosmetic surgery might be possible. Gazing at his face, Blake gasped that there was "nothing medical science can do to help you." The ambiguity in this statement is pointed: it could either mean that Doom's face was too deformed to salvage, or that it is impossible to fix by plastic surgery a mind that perceives self-ugliness. In *Fantastic Four* #199, the clone of Doctor Doom refers to Doom's face as "battle-scarred" rather than accident-scarred, and that he (the clone) is "not the hideously deformed mockery that you see yourself to be" rather than "that you are." In this same chronicle, Doom allows his hated foes, the Fantastic Four, to see his visage as his sculpture is being chiseled. Although the Thing taunts Doom with unflattering comparisons of their appearances, the Thing has also insulted any number of the FF's foes on similar grounds. More telling is that none of the Fantastic Four seems taken aback or even surprised upon finally getting to see Doom's long-masked face.

55. One theorist has suggested that Doom's scar is a single gouge along his chin, for that is the one place that all five counterparts keep concealed either by mask or facial hair.

CASE STUDIES SCIENCE FICTION

by GENE ENTWENDER art by CRAIG ANDERSON

Virtually every work of fiction provides its own frame of reality. In science fiction, this frame of reality often incorporates a system by which different Realities coexist, be they extended through time or through space. This column examines the systems of reality found in science fiction and compares them to that synthesized from the body of comic literature, the Omniversal Theory.

Ubik is one of Philip K. Dick's excursions into the hazy border between objective and subjective realities. The setting is an alternate future of the 1990s where a man named Glen Runciter heads an organization of anti-PSIs—humans gifted with the natural ability to nullify the psionic powers of telepaths, psychokineticists, precognitors, etc. Corporations who feel their business is being interfered with by PSIs can contact the Runciter organization for assistance in locating and interfering with the psionic power being used against them. Runciter's dead wife helps manage the firm from the mausoleum (the writer calls it a "moratorium") in which she rests. Electronic communication is possible during the cerebral activity following corporeal death. One of Runciter's top men is Joe Chip, whose job is to locate and test the PSI and anti-PSI abilities of others.

Hired to perform a large-scale anti-PSI operation, the Runciter organization is lured into a trap on the moon, set by an individual who stands to profit if Runciter's organization were out of commission and his PSI people could operate freely. A bomb explodes in a room full of Runciter's anti-PSIs. The survivors rush Runciter's body back to Earth and into the mausoleum where his wife lies. For Joe Chip and the surviving operatives, reality begins to deteriorate all around them. Cigarettes, money, cars, planes, and entire cities begin a general retrogression from the 1990s, slipping back to 1939. Runciter's agents begin to deteriorate into death. Although Runciter was unable to be revived into "half-life" at the mausoleum, Joe Chip begins to get messages from him by telephone, television, even words scribbled on matchbook covers. The messages reveal that the only way Joe can reverse the devolutionary process is by getting hold of a spraycan of "Ubik."

The unwary reader is given little indication of the subtle change from objective to subjective reality as the time reversion sets in. Since understanding *Ubik* hinges on differentiating the two kinds of realities, an explanatory note is in order. In objective reality, the environment, actions, and actors can be measured, tested, and agreed upon by a majority of those participating in the phenomenological field.[1] Subjective reality is a product of an individual's perceptions within that field. Each person's mind creates a subjective reality within him/her, which may more or less, depending on the individual, coincide with objective reality. *Ubik* poses a problem for this classification system by presenting a unique kind of subjective reality—one that is shared by a handful of individuals, yet is clearly not all it seems to be (that is, objectively real). Philip K. Dick has essentially blurred the boundaries between different kinds of realities.

The Omniversal Theory, regarding fiction as a continuum of objective realities, was not designed to deal with subjective encroachment upon objective realities. However, the demonstrably objective portion of the book presents two problems which are in the realm of Omniversal analysis. The first problem deals with precognition, a paranormal phenomenon existent in innumerable fictional Realities as well as our own; the second concerns the "anti-precog" who is somehow able to foil the foreknowledge of the precog.

Runciter describes precognition: "The precog sees a variety of futures, laid out side by side like cells in a beehive. For him, one has the greater luminosity, and this he picks."[2] The analogy of cells in a beehive is a good three-dimensional representation. A precog in one Reality at one given Atomic Instant would only have a reasonably finite number of alternatives facing him/her in the immediate future; it is not as if the precog would see all of the alternatives for all the Realities in the whole Omniverse. The future with the "greater luminosity" that the precog chooses is analogous to the comparative brightness of any intuitive hypothesis. Accepted and acted upon as the most probable future, the precogged Reality becomes subject to "self-fulfilling prophesy," since the precog's actions sway the odds toward certain events occurring in more Realities than not. If the precog finds him/herself in an alternate Reality other than the most luminous one, then random, unforeseeable factors will come into existence to prevent Reality from having any more likely course.

The anti-precog's ability enables him/her to jam the precog's ability by making the precog unable to discern a luminosity, in effect making each of the perceived futures seem equally likely. However, the anti-precognitive ability of Runciter's agent, Pat Conley, is more problematic than that. As explained by one of Pat's fellow agents, "The precog affected by her still sees one predominant future...the one luminous possibility is luminous because she's gone

1. "Phenomenological field" should not be confused with "Phenomenal Field." Phenomenology is the study of things and events that are perceived, and a "Phenomenological Field" would be the parameters of this perception. "Phenomenal Field" is an Omniversal term to describe a homogeneous pocket of reality.

2. Dick, p. 25.

into the past and changed it. By changing it, she changes the present, which includes the precog... She can cancel out the precog's decision *after he's made it*. She can enter the situation later on."[3] Pat clarifies somewhat: "I can change the past, but I don't go into the past; I don't time travel."[4]

When she first joins Runciter's group, Pat Conley gives a demonstration of her ability. Beginning from the frame of reference where eleven operatives are present for a meeting in Runciter's office, she proceeds to show them an alternate Reality in which Runciter has retired and is shopping for coins, an alternate Reality in which there are but three people in the office when she is introduced to Runciter, and one in which she and Joe Chip have been married for a year and the others are seeking employment with Runciter. Here is a jumbled mixture of people seemingly moving to alternate Realities by the power of one PSI's mind. It cannot be determined whether she is *a*) affecting subjective perceptions in some way, becoming like a television station trasmitting scenes from other realities, *b*) actually transporting them to the alternate Realities, or even *c*) affecting the past from the present, causing the Reality about her to seemingly change as it becomes alternate.

The nebulously-defined power of Pat Conley contributes to *Ubik*'s deliberately confused depiction of reality. Throughout the book, Runciter comments, "I'll have to think about it," each time he is confronted with an irresolute situation. Philip K. Dick's *Ubik* presents a series of irresolute situations which we readers, like Runciter, will just have to think about.

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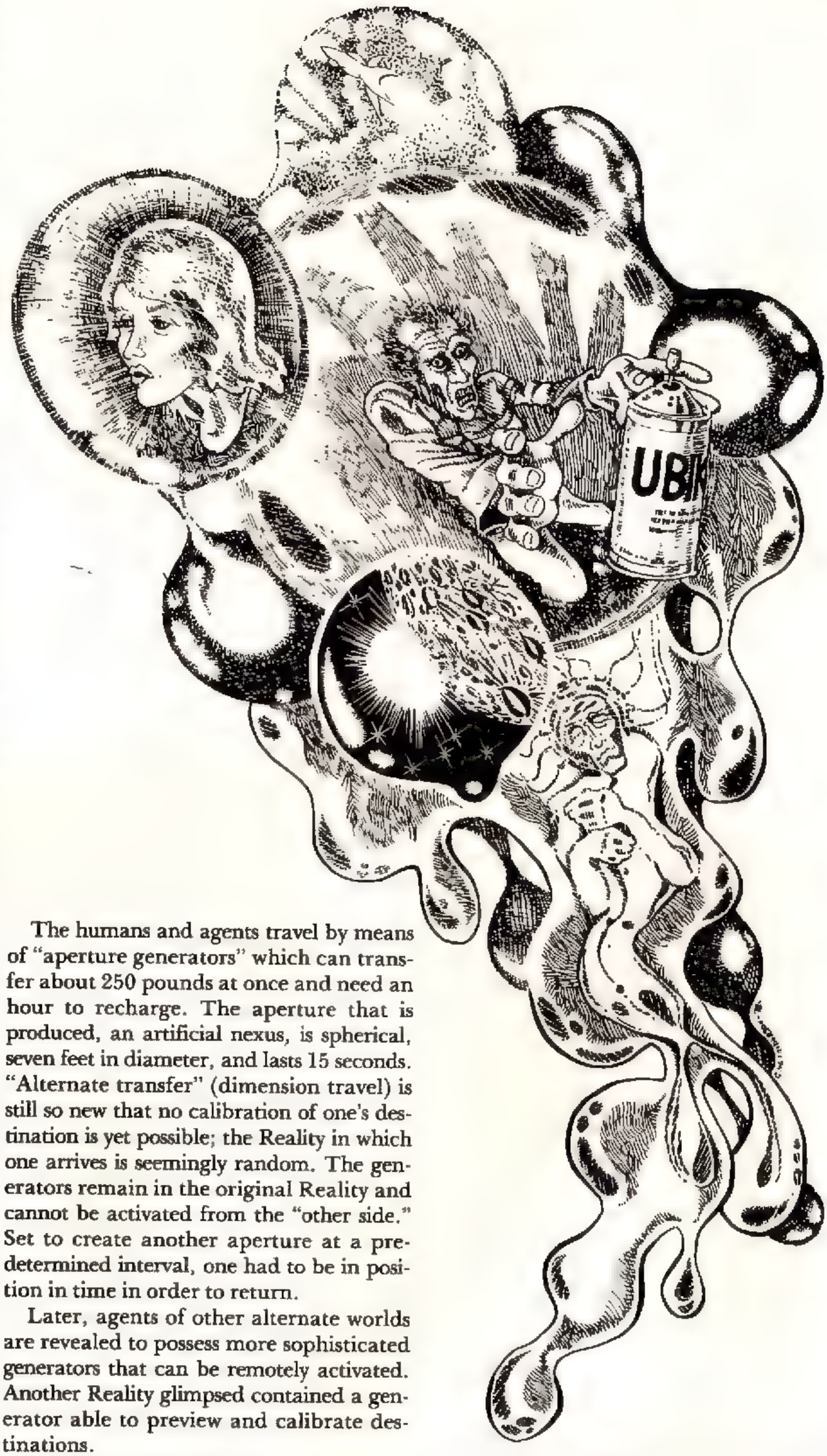
While "eternity" means all of time, "alternity" means all of the alternate worlds throughout time. Alternity, a word that is roughly analogous to "Omniverse,"[5] is the theme of Piers Anthony's *Ox* (Doubleday, 1976).

Alternity is explored in *Ox* by a multitude of beings: three humans, Veg (Vachel Smith), a brawny vegetarian, Cal (Calvin Potter), a tiny, carnivorous genius, and Aquilona, a compassionate omnivore; a beautiful, superhumanly trained "agent" of Earth's government named Tamme; a sentient, metal-eating caterpillar-like machine called Mach; and the intelligent sparkle pattern known as OX. Each of the explorers of alternity has his own special means of travel, and his own reasons for doing so.



The humans and agents travel by means of "aperture generators" which can transfer about 250 pounds at once and need an hour to recharge. The aperture that is produced, an artificial nexus, is spherical, seven feet in diameter, and lasts 15 seconds. "Alternate transfer" (dimension travel) is still so new that no calibration of one's destination is yet possible; the Reality in which one arrives is seemingly random. The generators remain in the original Reality and cannot be activated from the "other side." Set to create another aperture at a predetermined interval, one had to be in position in time in order to return.

Later, agents of other alternate worlds are revealed to possess more sophisticated generators that can be remotely activated. Another Reality glimpsed contained a generator able to preview and calibrate destinations.

At the beginning of *Ox*, our human protagonists have little idea of the great variety of Realities (here called "frames") in alternity, as they set out to test the aperture generators for Earth's government. Traveling to the prehistoric Reality of Paleo, they at first assume that they have traveled into their Earth's past. Later, they realize that Paleo is simply an alternate frame co-existing in the present with their Earth. It is only after OX sets them on a set chain of alternate Realities (resembling a mathematical puzzle) that they experience the true variety of alternity. They encounter alternate Realities in which the only appreciable difference between their worlds is the relative sophistication of the aperture generators. They encoun-

3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*
5. The word "alternity," adopted by the publishers of *Omniverse*, also appears in David Gerrold's *The Man Who Folded Himself*.

ter alternate Realities like Paleo, where the divergences occurred millions of years ago, causing differences in the very climate and dominant form of Earth. They also encounter Realities with natural phenomena so foreign to their own Earth's that it is difficult to imagine what the divergence between Realities had been. Some of these include a world inhabited by an alien orchestra, a world where the humans have trunks instead of noses and harvest edible fog, and a world where parallel and perpendicular bars stretch as far as the eye can see, like an infinite Jungle Gym.

The sentient machines from the Machine-Hive world have a limited, built-in alternate-transfer capacity. Until the end of the book, they appear to be a threat to the other forms of life, seeking to exploit and rule as many alternate Realities as they can. However, when OX gathers all of the participating entities together to resolve their differences, OX decides that it is the machines who are deserving of the "power of alternity," knowledge integrating the alternate frames with the pattern framework itself.

OX, the sparkle pattern, is able to utilize its energy to travel through alternity at will. OX appears to be a native of the inter-dimensional space between frames, and travels through the frames by projecting "shoots." Its perceptions are different from those of the physical beings; it sees physical life as "spots." OX forms an enclave with three physical beings, for means of mutual survival and understanding: Dec, an intelligent "manta" from an "alien" frame; Orn, a rational prehistoric bird from Paleo; and Cub, a human, secretly an extra-dimensional offspring of Cal and Aquilona. OX is able to direct events toward favorable alternatives by locating frames where what he chooses to have happen occurs. OX is unable to move "externals" (physical life) from one geographic position to another, but it can move them to other frames at will. OX is even able in effect to displace itself in time. Speaking through Mach, OX explains:

> "Time travel is not possible within frames, but the appearance of it can be generated by phasing across frames ...By instituting a type of feedback circuit, a pattern entity is able to accelerate a portion of a limited complex of frames... But that portion is then out of phase and can not interact effectively with normal frames until it reverts. The only way to adjust the time-orientations of individuals so that one entity may interact with another, in a different frame despite a dichotomy of time, is to enable the individual to cross on the bias."[6]

In this way, OX was able to "age" Cub until he was mature enough to be able to fend for himself.

At the gathering at the book's end, OX discloses another facet of Reality. An individual's trauma, it explains, extends across related frames (those in the same multiverse), and this sometimes manifests itself in dreams, *deja vu*, and spectral manifestations. That which we term the supernatural may simply be reflections of occurrences in adjacent Realities.[7]

6. Anthony, p. 213.
7. This opens a whole new field of speculation for students of the Omniverse.

Once one can unravel the complex skein of concepts and details, *Ox* becomes a well-conceived visualization of the framework of alternate Realities. This framework, in many ways, is subject to many of the basic laws of reality embodied in the Omniversal Theory, the major difference being in the feasibility of time travel.

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Isaac Asimov's *The End of Eternity* (Doubleday, 1955) is a classic tale of time travel which tentatively embraces the idea of a multiverse of Realities. Beginning with the time travelers thinking in terms of but one Reality, and ending with their newfound awareness of the multiplicity of Reality, the book doesn't quite resolve the differences between the two concepts.

The Eternals, a select group of people born in the various ages, exist in a timeless zone said to be parallel to "Reality." This zone, which they call "Eternity," is the transtemporal medium which exists in no time, but has access to all ("Limbo," in Omniversal parlance). The Eternals operate time machines called "kettles," which literally elevator them "upwhen" and "downwhen" in time. Slipping into "Reality," the Eternals' Technicians cause a "Minimum Necessary Change" (MNC), the net effect of which has been calculated beforehand, in order to alter "Reality" in a desired direction. In the frame of reference of a single Reality, reality is fluid.

Each MNC wrought by a Technician would cause an immediate change visible to the Eternals. Space travel would disappear, an age of plastics would be replaced by one of chrome, or drugs would suddenly be made obsolete by dream soma. The Eternals collected samples of art, science, and literature before implementing the MNC, since culture would be irrevocably altered. While certain individuals would cease to exist in the altered Reality, the surviving inhabitants (called "Timers") would proceed, living an entirely different lifestyle, unaware that Reality had ever been any different.

Andrew Harlan, a Technician, is kettled into the 20th Century to carry with him the knowledge to create and structure the beginnings of the Eternals, to complete the circle of their existence. Near the book's end, Harlan learns some new revelations about time from Noys, a woman "Futurist" from beyond the 100,000th Century, who effected an unwarranted change in the past. She tells him:

> "You smile at the ignorance of the Timers, who know only one Reality. We smile at the ignorance of the Eternals, who think there are many Realities but that only one exists at a time... The number of Realities is infinite. The number of any subclass of Realities is also infinite. For instance, the number of Realities containing Eternity is infinite; the number in which Eternity does not exist is infinite; the number in which Eternity does exist but is abolished is also infinite."[8]

With these words, Noys forms in Harlan's mind the decision to abolish Eternity.

In spite of the multiple Reality framework assumed by the end of the novel, *The End of Eternity* fails to answer adequately two important questions. First, why does Eternity remain constantly adjacent to but a single Reality, the one with which they are tampering? Being in a timeless zone, they should have access to all Realities, not just the one with the net effect of the MNCs. Second, despite the Futurists' recognition of multiple Realities, they insisted upon a "Basic State," a one true "most probable" Reality. As explained by Noys:

> "First we developed the calculus of Realities and tested our Reality through it. We were amazed to find we lived in a Reality of rather low probability... It seemed obvious to us almost at once that there had been at one point in physiotime...another Reality. The other Reality, the one of maximum probability, we call the Basic State... We learned the destiny of man in the Reality that actually exists in order that we might compare it eventually with the Basic State."[9]

If there is such a Basic State, a Reality that is more probable than all others, a Reality that is a standard from which all others deviate, how did all the imperfect facsimiles come about? What is their purpose?

Because of these vagaries, *The End of Eternity* mystifies as much as it enlightens. However, having been written back in 1955, it remains one of the first intelligent attempts at delving into the nature of time travel in a multiverse of Realities. ■

8. Asimov, p. 187.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 184.

GODCYCLES FROM RAGNAROK TO APOKOLIPS

by MARK GRUENWALD

When the old gods died, then rose the new gods.

The religion of the old Norsemen was fatalistic. Unlike the Greeks, who envisioned their gods as being immortal and eternal, the Norse gods of Asgard were fated from inception to perish. On the day of *Ragnarok*, the Twilight of the Gods, the Asgardians[1] would enact a scenario "written in the stars" wherein all would meet their ungodly demise. But even in the fall of the heavens, there would be new light, new hope, for the gods of old were said to bear the seed for new gods.

This article will examine the Norse gods and Ragnarok, both as they appeared in the traditional canon of myth collected in Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Eddas*[2] and in *Thor* comics. We will consider the Asgardians' lineal destendants, the *New Gods* of New Genesis and Apokolips; and determine how one evolved into the other. Finally, this article will show how Asgard and New Genesis are but spokes in the celestial mandala we shall term the Godcycle.

To begin, let us define the term *god*. In the Omniversal sense, all gods are literally "real." This is to say, the beings of myth and religion, considered by modern rationalists to be figurative personifications of abstract concepts and fancy, are literal, physically-manifested entities who dwell in Realities apart from that of Earth. Unlike the gods of our Reality, who require *belief* to sustain their "existence," the gods of the Omniverse exist unto themselves, independent of the collective consciousness of lesser beings. Hence, a god is any being (particularly one who has entered into our legends and myths) whose scope of power is beyond Man's, and has originated in a Reality beyond Earth's.[3]

THE ASGARDIANS AND THE AESIR

The annals of the gods as transcribed by men are filled with discontinuities and inconsistencies, even within single works like the *Prose Eddas*. The variations between the Aesir of ancient legend and the Asgardians of modern chronicles argue for the separate existence of the two groups.

Although recent issues of *Thor* have demonstrated that the Asgardians have a greater common heritage with the Aesir than previously shown,[4] there are still outstanding uniquenesses between the groups which cannot be reconciled. Odin of the Aesir forfeited his eye to Mimir the water-spirit to gain omniscience; Odin of the Asgardians cast his eye down the well of Mimir the fire-spirit to learn of Ragnarok's imminence. Thor of the Aesir possessed red hair and a beard; the Asgardian Thor is blond and clean-shaven. Sif of the Aesir had hair of spun gold and was a fertility goddess; Sif of the Asgardians has ebony hair and has not been shown to be particularly fertile. Balder of the Aesir was the god of light and beauty and the son of Odin and Frigga; Balder of the Asgardians has not demonstrated any affinity for light, nor has he been described as a blood-son of Odin. Further, Asgardians

1. The word "Asgardians" appears to be an appellation coined by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby. The gods of Asgard were called the Aesir in the original myths.
2. The *Prose Eddas*, a collection of tales and poems assembled in 1222-23 A.D., are the most complete source of Norse mythology.
3. This can mean dimensional or extraterrestrial. An example of the latter would be the Celestials depicted in *The Eternals*.
4. *Thor* #274-276 introduce Frigga, wife of Odin; Sigyn, wife of Loki; Hermod the messenger god; Odin's eight-hooved horse Sleipnir; and show Odin plucking out his eye for knowledge; Balder dying by mistletoe; and Loki punished by serpent's venom.

like Hogun, Fandral and Volstagg have no known counterparts among the Aesir, while Aesir like another son of Odin, Vidar, have no known counterpart among the Asgardians.

The most obvious difference between the god-races is that the Asgardians at present are younger than the Aesir were at the time of Ragnarok. While there is still time for Thor and Sif to wed and have sons (Modi and Magni) who will play instrumental roles in Ragnarok as it has been described for the Aesir, there is not time for Balder to sire a son (Forseti) before Ragnarok, since he has already met his demise in the Asgardian chronicles.[5]

The accounts of Ragnarok itself vary. In the *Eddas*,[6] the death of Balder by an arrow of mistletoe signaled the beginning of the end. On a field near Valhalla, the gods assembled to battle the giants, trolls, and dwarves that Loki had united to conquer Asgard. Odin was devoured by the giant wolf, Fenrir, and became the first casualty of the war. He was avenged by his son Vidar. Thor launched an attack on his ancient enemy, the Midgard Serpent, and crushed him with his hammer Mjolnir, but died in victory from the serpent's venom. Heimdall and Loki battled each other to the death on the Rainbow Bridge. Finally, after the carnage laid waste to the realm, the fire-demon Surt set the heavens aflame.

The chronicles of Asgard depict a different scenario. In *Thor* #200, the prophetess Volla relates the tale of Ragnarok-to-be and makes no mention of Balder's death.[7] It is Heimdall who was the first to fall in the onslaught of giants, not Odin, and Heimdall manages to destroy the Rainbow Bridge before succumbing to the invaders. Thor's battle with the Midgard Serpent ended not in his victory only to collapse from the serpent's venom, but in the simultaneous destruction of both combatants. The fates of Odin, Balder, Loki and other principals are left undisclosed.

Volla concludes her tale to the Asgardians: "Naught shall remain of the golden realm, save a fiery, flaming ember—a smoldering celestial cinder in the fabric of eternity. But time rolls on, without beginning—and with no end. The centuries shall turn to ages, the ages to eons, as the world shall cool, and new land shall rise from beneath the restless seas. And, as it ever was—and as ever it must be—new life shall come aborning—and gods shall rise again."[8]

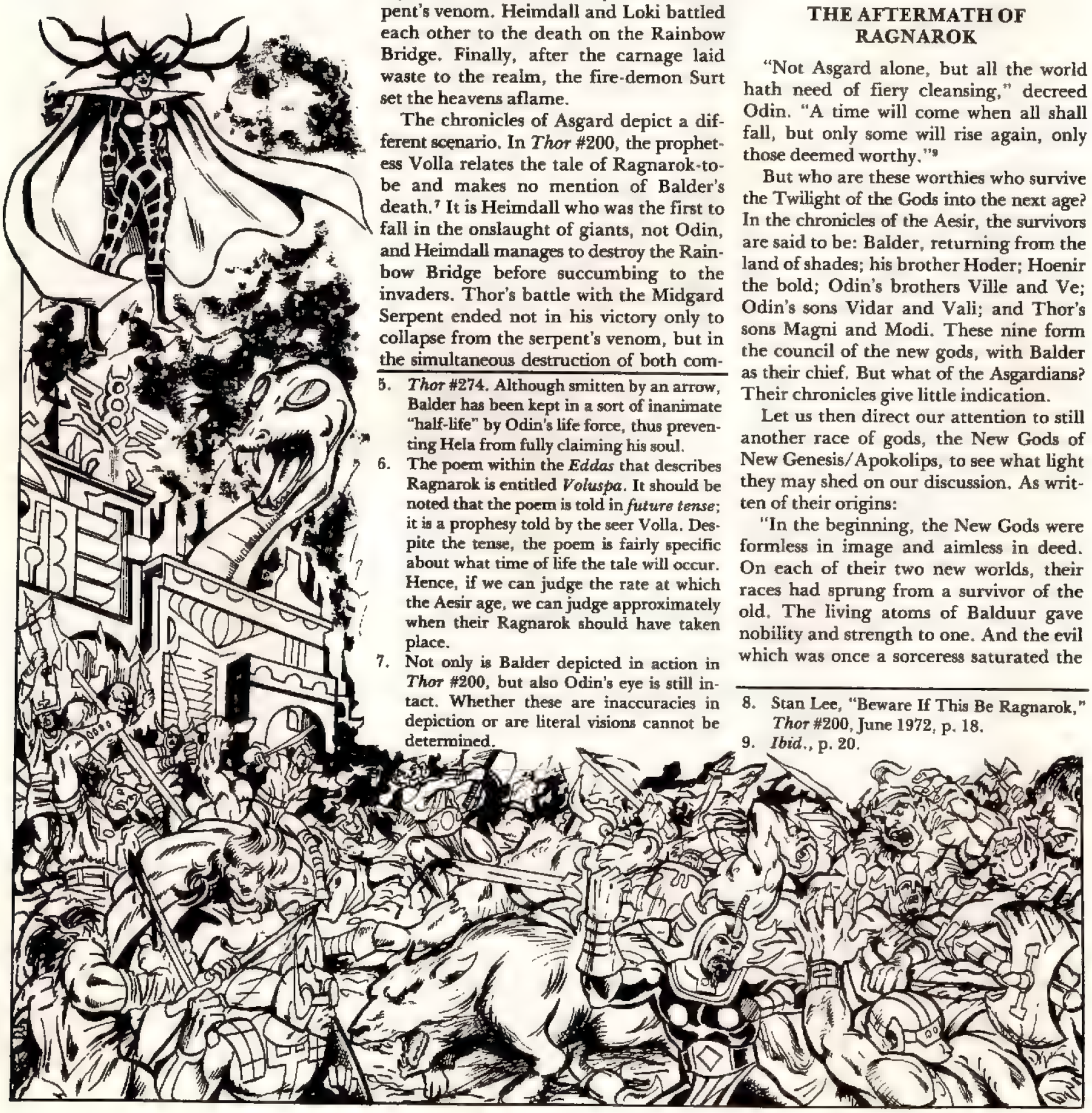
THE AFTERMATH OF RAGNAROK

"Not Asgard alone, but all the world hath need of fiery cleansing," decreed Odin. "A time will come when all shall fall, but only some will rise again, only those deemed worthy."[9]

But who are these worthies who survive the Twilight of the Gods into the next age? In the chronicles of the Aesir, the survivors are said to be: Balder, returning from the land of shades; his brother Hoder; Hoenir the bold; Odin's brothers Ville and Ve; Odin's sons Vidar and Vali; and Thor's sons Magni and Modi. These nine form the council of the new gods, with Balder as their chief. But what of the Asgardians? Their chronicles give little indication.

Let us then direct our attention to still another race of gods, the New Gods of New Genesis/Apokolips, to see what light they may shed on our discussion. As written of their origins:

"In the beginning, the New Gods were formless in image and aimless in deed. On each of their two new worlds, their races had sprung from a survivor of the old. The living atoms of Balduur gave nobility and strength to one. And the evil which was once a sorceress saturated the



5. *Thor* #274. Although smitten by an arrow, Balder has been kept in a sort of inanimate "half-life" by Odin's life force, thus preventing Hela from fully claiming his soul.
6. The poem within the *Eddas* that describes Ragnarok is entitled *Voluspa*. It should be noted that the poem is told in *future tense*; it is a prophesy told by the seer Volla. Despite the tense, the poem is fairly specific about what time of life the tale will occur. Hence, if we can judge the rate at which the Aesir age, we can judge approximately when their Ragnarok should have taken place.
7. Not only is Balder depicted in action in *Thor* #200, but also Odin's eye is still intact. Whether these are inaccuracies in depiction or are literal visions cannot be determined.
8. Stan Lee, "Beware If This Be Ragnarok," *Thor* #200, June 1972, p. 18.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

shadow-planet."[10] As in the chronicles of the Aesir, Balduur (or Balder) is said to survive the cataclysm that destroyed the old gods. However, unlike with the Aesir, who believed that only the "worthy" would replenish the new world, the New Gods call for a sorceress to provide the seed for a race of unworthies, gods of darkness and evil. Although not mentioned by name, this sorceress seems analogous to the Asgardian Karnilla, whose affections for Balder were no secret.[11]

What other evidence have we of a common tradition between Asgard and New Genesis/Apokolips? Both are described as being in an adjacent dimension to Earth,[12] with the transdimensional Rainbow Bridge used for passage between Asgard and Earth, while the technological Boom Tubes, fashioned by Metron after the theories of Himon, are used for passage between Earth and New Genesis/Apokolips.[13] Metron indeed speaks of a "bridge" that fell when the old gods died.[14] Lonar the Wanderer discovered the ruins of the old gods on New Genesis' surface. Examining various artifacts, he picked up an unmistakable facsimile of the Asgardian Thor's winged helmet.[15] Further, the battle between New Genesis and Apokolips, with a truce brought about by an exchange of hostages (Orion for Scott Free) has unmistakable parallels with the war between the Aesir and the Vanir (a rival race of gods) wherein there was also an exchange of hostages—Mimir and Hoenir for Njord and Freyr.[16]

Hence we have supportive evidence of a link between Asgard and New Genesis/Apokolips. It becomes apparent that the New Genesis/Apokolips of our chronicles is not the transliteration of Asgard in either the pages of *Thor* or the *Prose Eddas*. The Asgardians are contemporaries of modern day Earth, as are the New Genesisians: if the latter are to follow by an "age," they cannot exist simultaneously. Nor are the New Genesisians direct descendants of the Aesir: the accounts of who survived Ragnarok are at odds.

Thus, we can assume that the gods of New Genesis/Apokolips (whose saga unfolded in *New Gods*, *Forever People*, and *Mister Miracle*) are descended from yet another pantheon of dimensional counterparts to the gods of Asgard we have examined. What the individual characteristics of this pantheon are that distinguish it from its counterparts cannot be determined.[17]

More significant than the question of dimensional variance is this: Why are the destinies of these gods linked? What is the relationship between these dimensional deities and the Earth? What is the real meaning of Ragnarok?

PRECESSION

To answer these, we must temporarily move our discussion out of the realm of mythology and into that of astronomy. We beg the indulgence of the reader at this point, for it will not be immediately apparent how this digression applies to our thesis.

The planetary body called Earth makes three major different kinds of movements in space. The first is *axial*: the Earth's period of axial rotation is 24 hours, or one day. The second kind is *orbital*: the Earth's period of orbital revolution around the sun is 365¼ days, or one year. Its third kind of movement is *precessional*: the Earth's period of equinoctical precession is about 26,000 years. It is this cyclical precession of the Equinoxes that ultimately relates to the myth of Ragnarok.

The plane of the Earth's orbit is called the *Ecliptic plane*; the other planets of the

10. Jack Kirby, "The Pact," *New Gods* #7, February-March 1972, p. 1.
11. Karnilla first appeared in *Journey Into Mystery* #107.
12. The Boom Tube is a means of interdimensional travel used by the New Gods between New Genesis and Earth, while Asgard has been described as being in "hyperspace" in *Thor* #275.
13. Could the "X-Element" be the still-energized fragments of the Rainbow Bridge?
14. *New Gods* #1, p. 17.
15. *Forever People* #5, p. 2.
16. With the Aesir and Vanir, however, it would not be as easy to characterize one as good and one as evil as in the New Gods' case.
17. We should not conclude, however, that there are but two sets of dimensional counterparts to the Norse gods in the Omniverse. "Mythological" dimensions are not exempt from the same divergences that make parallel Earths so numerous.

Solar System never travel very far from this plane. This plane intersects the celestial sphere in a great circle called the *Ecliptic*, which is exactly the path of the sun through the stars during the course of a year.

The axis around which the Earth rotates is not perpendicular to the Ecliptic plane, but is inclined to the perpendicular at an angle of 23½ degrees. Hence, the imaginary plane through the Earth's equator is inclined 23½ degrees to the Ecliptic plane. The Earth's equatorial plane intersects the celestial sphere in a great circle called the *Celestial Equator* (see Figure 1).

The Ecliptic passes through a group of twelve constellations called the *Zodiac*, which divide it into twelve sections (see Figure 2). The two points in which the Ecliptic intersects the Celestial Equator are called the *Equinoxes*. The two points on the Ecliptic farthest from the Celestial Equator are called the *Solstices* (see Figure 1). When the sun is located at an Equinox, the number of hours in the day and night are equal, and we have the beginning of spring or fall. When the sun is located at a Solstice, the number of hours in the day and night differ by their greatest amounts, and we have the onset of summer or winter.

The four constellations of the Zodiac in which the points of Equinox and Solstice are located were called by the ancients the "four corners of the Earth."[18] The constellation corresponding to the spring Equinox (that is, the constellation in which the sun "rose" on the first day of spring) gave its name to the "age." Through observation, the ancients became aware that the point at which the sun was located on the day of the spring Equinox was gradually moving into another constellation of the Zodiac. Over the span of centuries, it was learned that in 2160 years, the sun would be in a completely different constellation of the Zodiac on the first day of spring, the constellation immediately to the west of its former location.

Considering, as did the ancients, that the Zodiac is divided into a half that is "submerged" (beneath the Celestial Equator) and a half that is "dry" (above the Celestial Equator),[19] it is easy to see from where the many myths of flooding derived, as well as why the ancients considered the Earth a "new world" when its "four corners" had changed in respect to the sky. The constellation that "rose out of the depths" was always the one that corresponded to the spring Equinox, and that constellation gave its name to the new age. This Zodiacal symbol had a pervasive influence on all the mythologies and religions of Earth.[20] For example, the age that we are presently in, Pisces, bloomed around 1 A.D., and the many references to "fish" in early Christianity (from Christ's disciples being fishermen to the IHS insignia which is, among other things, an abbreviation for the Greek *ikthys*, meaning fish) seem more than coincidental. Append to that the notion that the dawning of one age also meant the ending of the last, and one will see the symbology of the old age used to signify the passing of the old. For example, the age before Pisces was Aries the Ram, and Christ, as the final son of the age of Aries, has been called the sacrificed

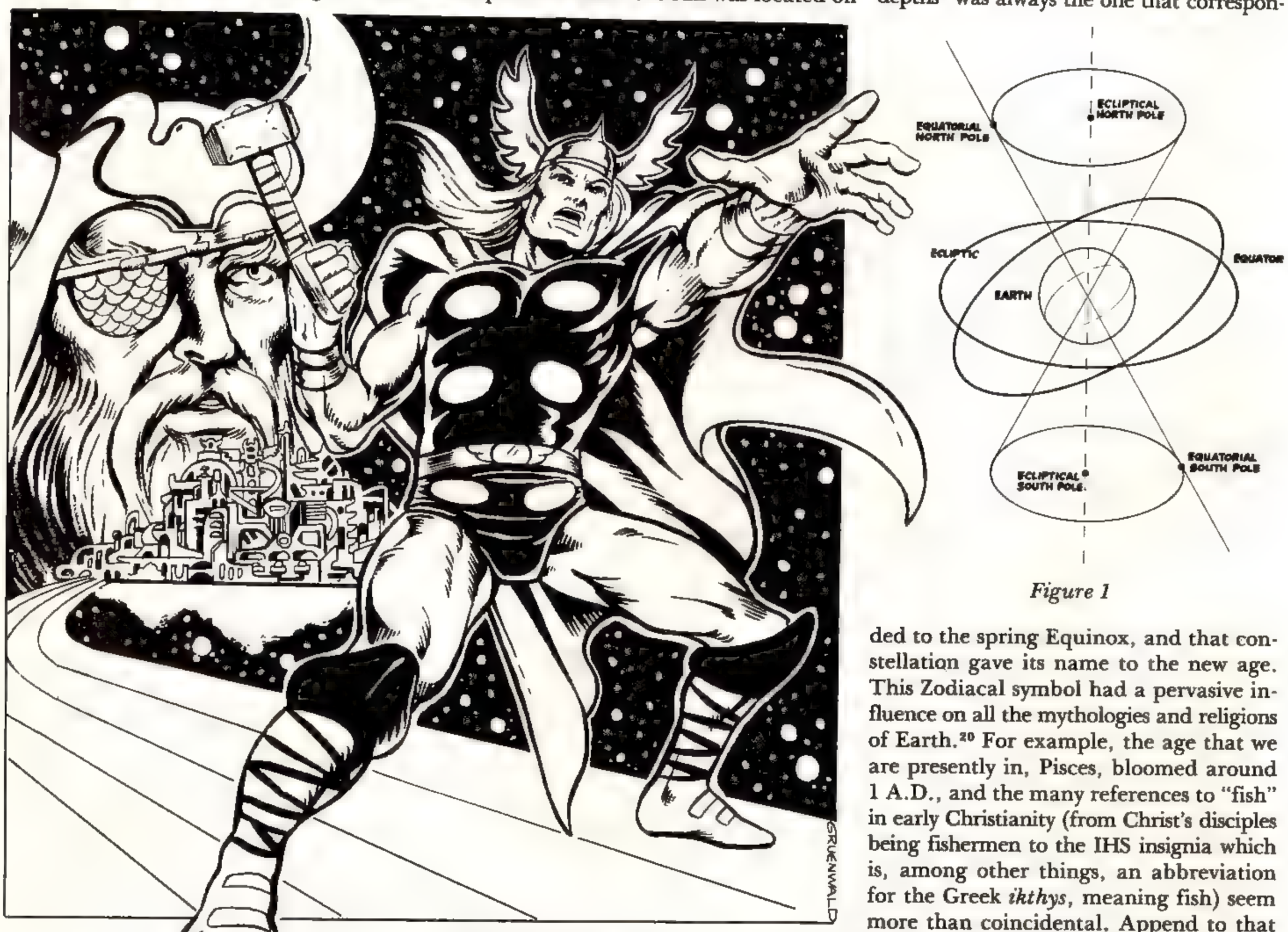


Figure 1

18. Giorgio de Santillana and Hertha von Dechend, *Hamlet's Mill: An Essay Investigating the Origins of Human Knowledge and Its Transmission Through Myth*, David R. Godine Pub., Boston, 1969, p. 62. The basic premise of precession and its relationship to cyclical myths is explored fully in this 451 page volume, and is the primary reference source for this article. Highly recommended.

19. "[In most myths] there is no distinction between the concepts of terrestrial waters and atmospheric waters." (George Dumezil, *Gods of the Ancient Northmen*, University of California Press, 1973, p. 144.)

20. We are making the assumption here that Earth-One and Earth-M are similar to our Earth in this respect.

lamb. Or, the age before Aries (approximately 2000 B.C.) was that of Taurus the Bull, and one of the great leaders at the dawning of the age of Aries was Moses, who, in a particularly famous episode, became indignant with his followers, whom he found worshipping a symbol of the previous age, a golden calf.[21]

The number of parallels one can find in the mythology and religion of the world that relate to the Zodiacal age in which the legends originated are too numerous to be dismissed.

Figure 2

YGGDRASIL AND THE CELESTIAL AXIS

While the Zodiacal precession was "cosmic time" to the ancients, to modern rationalists it is but a wobble of the Earth's axis and nothing more. But in multiverses where the sagas of Thor and the New Gods are unfolding, what is mere myth in our frame of reference may be literally real. Thus, the changing of the celestial ages is of real significance to the dimensional gods.

Let us postulate, as some scholars of mythology have done,[22] that the Asgardian Tree of Life, *Yggdrasil*, which is said to be the pole upon which Asgard, Midgard (Earth), and the netherworld are built, is a manifestation of the rotational axis of Earth. This would mean that Asgard is at the hub of the Zodiacal precession, and that they are at the axis of the mandala of celestial destiny. The transition between one Zodiacal age and the next would be comparable to Ragnarok, the twilight and new dawn of the gods. Ragnarok, if this is the case, is cyclical, and nothing can hasten or retard its natural occurrence once every 2160 years.

The New Gods are the successors to the gods of Asgard who perished in the Ragnarok that occurred about 1 A.D. The Asgardians of *Thor* comics are the successors to whatever nameless old gods perished in their own Ragnarok at the same time in the dawning of the age of Pisces. We are now entering the age of Aquarius, and by 2160 A.D., the New Gods and the Asgardians will have perished, and their descendants will be born.[23]

THE SOURCE

The Asgardians are bound to the Zodiacal precession by Yggdrasil, but what is the New Gods' connection? What is the "Tree of Life" to the New Gods? Izaya the Highfather spoke before the monolithic wall at the heart of New Genesis: "This wall is our link with the Source. It lived even as the old gods died."[24] Orion added, "It is eternal. It is the Life Equation."[25] Metron the Thinker proclaimed, "And beyond all the knowledge and sweeping concept at our command, the mystery of the Source lies—serene, omnipotent, all-wise."[26] Himon the Visionary exclaimed, "The Source! It lives! It burns! When we reach out to touch it, the core of each of us is magnified."[27]

From these pronouncements, we can draw a number of conclusions. The Source is that which the New Gods worship—the gods' god, as it were. It is the Source of life to the gods; the dead are delivered to its heart, there to know life eternal. The Source is an intangible force of which every New God knows himself to be a part.

The Source is manifested in the monolithic wall on New Genesis. There, it acts

21. These examples and many more can be found in the aforementioned *Hamlet's Mill*.
22. De Santillana and von Dechend, *op. cit.*, p. 158.
23. It is interesting to speculate on who, like Balder and Karnilla of the Asgardians, will provide the "living atoms" for the race of gods after the New Gods. Apparently it takes two polar opposites to seed the diverse race of the future. I theorize that it may be Apokolips-born Big Barda and New Genesis-born Scott Free (who makes the greatest escape of his life by surviving the Twilight of the Gods).
24. *New Gods* #1, p. 7.
25. *Ibid.*
26. *New Gods* #5, p. 4.
27. *Mister Miracle* #9, p. 21.

as an oracle, a bestower of wisdom and counsel, as a disembodied hand writes messages on its surface in cosmic fire. The staff of the Highfather enables him to address the Source through the wall.

That the Source lived even as the old gods died suggests that it is independent of the life/death cycle. Being independent and yet integral to the cycle of the gods' destiny, even so far as being called the Life Equation, makes it very analogous to Yggdrasil, the Tree of Life in Asgard. Hence, Yggdrasil and the Source are probably both manifestations of the Celestial Axis at different ages of the cycle.

It is often a source of mystery why the gods of these other dimensions (i.e., Asgard and New Genesis/Apokolips) are so inextricably bound to the dimension of Earth. The answer becomes clear when we consider the Tree of Life and the Source linked to the celestial pole around which the Earth rotates and precesses. Somewhere along that axis are permanent nexi—interdimensional pathways—that join the worlds more closely than Earth is joined to the moon.

At the day of Ragnarok, does the Earth too perish in the fiery twilight of its sister dimensions? No. While the Earth is *influenced* by the cycle of the adjoining dimensions, just as it is influenced by the celestial bodies of its own dimension, its basic nature is different from the "godly dimensions." Hence, it is not literally bound to the 2160 year life/death cycle.

DARKSEID AND THE CYCLE

We have shown that the transition from Ragnarok to Ragnarok is as cyclical as the seasons, and for some cosmic reason, the old and new gods are bound to the cycle, their actions unable to affect the inevitability of its machinations. But, are the gods unaware of the cycle's existence? Why do they seem to fear that the death of all gods will be before its appointed time? It is apparent that not much knowledge of the previous age or the cycle as a whole survives each Ragnarok.

But suppose that through successive turns of the cosmic mandala, some gods have learned to preserve the knowledge of the inevitable regularity of death and rebirth.[28] What would such gods do with the knowledge? Would they accept the immutability of their existence, or would they tamper with it—try to get off the wheel of reincarnation?

Let us consider Darkseid of Apokolips. Having risen to political power on his world, he has now dedicated his life to the pursuit of that which is called the Anti-Life Equation. As Darkseid himself said of it, "With it, I shall control every living creature in this universe with a mere word."[29] Metron describes the Anti-Life Equation as "the outside control of all living thought."[30] Are we to assume then that the Anti-Life Equation is simply a cosmic formula by which it is possible to negate free will? What then is its connection with the Source, described as the Life Equation?

Perhaps Anti-Life is the key to unlocking the gods' life force, the Source.[31] That it can control living thought is but a side effect that will prevent anyone from interfering with the Equation's solver. Hence, Darkseid's true purpose behind his pursuit of Anti-Life is not mere temporal control of sentient entities in existence, but rather the knowledge and control of his *own* existence. Darkseid seeks the mastery of his own destiny, the freedom from the celestial mandala of the gods' fate. If Darkseid were to possess the Equation, it seems in his character that he would destroy the Source and end the eternal cycle of reincarnation. Darkseid ultimately seeks the release of eternal death for all gods.

ODIN AND THE CYCLE

Is there any god amongst the Asgardians who might have an inkling of the cosmic cycle of their lives and wishes to control it? Loki, god of evil, would seem to be the most likely candidate, for his deeds have always bespoken that if he cannot rule Asgard, he would see it destroyed. But would Loki want it forever destroyed, or simply destroyed so that when it is reborn he may have a better chance at ruling it? It does not seem in Loki's character to seek true oblivion. Nor despite Loki's cunning does his knowledge seem sweeping enough to ponder or fathom the wherefores of existence. Further, Loki's overriding concern with temporal power precludes any deeper concern for self-mastery.

The Asgardian who seems most concerned with cosmic knowledge and self-mastery is the All-Father Odin himself. Odin above all Asgardians has been obsessed with the pursuit of knowledge: he listens to the counsel of his viziers, his clairvoyant ravens Hugin and Munin, and Mimir of the fire-well. He dispatches his subjects on quests whose sole purpose is knowledge, as when he sent Thor to learn Galactus' origins.[32] Further, Odin's actions are unfathomable at times; they seem directed towards a purpose that only he knows.

Let us consider just one of his more incomprehensible machinations. In *Thor* #203,[33] Odin temporarily relieved Heimdall of his duties as guardian of the Bridge, and sent him to Earth to collect some specimens of humanity. Odin sought to transform them (using the power of Ego-Prime) into higher forms of life—gods. The three Earth-beings who were chosen were Chi Lo, a farmer; Jason Kimbal, an artist; and Carter Dyam, a soldier. Heimdall stated, "Thy talent doth remain with thee and for that reason thou wert sought."[34] It seems that Odin sought humans who embodied the twelve great achievements of Man, according to the Ancients, which were: Farmer, Artist, Soldier, Sailor, Hunter, Scientist, Priest, Poet, Musician, Craftsman, Physician, and Philosopher, and only got around to collecting the first three. After transformation, Odin pronounced, "This day, a new race of gods has been born—a younger race—one which will breathe fresh fire into the furnace of the Cosmic All."[35]

Could this Cosmic All be the Source/Yggdrasil/Celestial Axis? Perhaps Odin's purpose in forming a race of new gods prior to Ragnarok is to throw a monkey wrench into the spokes of the cosmic wheel? Perhaps Odin sought to avert Ragnarok and alter the balance of the mandala in an effort to free himself and his people—even at the expense of an unwitting new race of gods. Whereas Darkseid seeks to destroy the cycle of existence, Odin simply wants to escape it.[36]

•••

We have discovered a rich tapestry based on ancient cosmology to interweave the modern mythologies of the gods of Asgard and the gods of New Genesis/Apokolips. While a study of the body of work upon which we are inscribing the Godcycle will not necessarily lead us to one infallible explanation, the metaphor of the celestial mandala dictating the destiny of a race of gods is too sweeping to dismiss as circumstantial. ■

28. As was proposed in E. R. Eddison's *The Worm Ouroboros*.

29. *Forever People* #4, p. 12.

30. *New Gods* #1, p. 9.

31. This was also the conclusion of chronicler Gerry Conway in *Return of the New Gods* #19. Implicit in this article is that the *Return of the New Gods* series is not in the same canon as Jack Kirby's *New Gods*.

32. *Thor* #167, 168.

33. Gerry Conway, "They Walk Like Gods," *Thor* #203, September 1972.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

36. That Odin claims to have "ordained" Ragnarok in *Thor* #200 (p. 20) should not be construed in any way as his causing or willing the phenomenon to happen. "Ordain" simply means an official sanction, and that Odin would give his blessing to his immutable fate indicates that at the time of "flash-forward" he has given up trying to free his people from the cycle.

reality spotlight

the AVENGERS®

by dean mullaney

art by rich bruning

The first Marvel series to undergo scrutiny in "Reality Spotlight" is *The Avengers*. While it can be argued that the Fantastic Four engaged in the premiere time travel story in the Marvel Universe (*Fantastic Four* #5), it is the Avengers who have participated, over the years, in the greater number and greater variety of time and dimension spanning adventures.

Several individual Avengers possess unique heritages or attributes which relate to other times or dimensions. Thor, hailing from the dimensional world of Asgard, possesses the hammer Mjolnir which, among its many powers, can transport people to other times and dimensions. Former Avenger Hercules is a native of the dimension of Olympus. Honorary Avenger Captain Marvel co-exists in the Negative Zone, an anti-matter universe, while another honorary, the Black Knight, chose to reside in the 12th Century for a number of years. These are but a few of the many Avengers who have had ties to other Realities.

One of the Avengers' most frequent enemies, Kang the Conqueror, is a resident of the future and an accomplished time traveler. The entire Kang War/Celestial Madonna saga may well be the most ambitious time travel tale ever to be chronicled in comics. Further, the Avengers as a team have probably had greater experience at time and dimension travel than any other assemblage of superhumans. They have been in such varied locales as Arkon's dimension, Olympus, Dormammu's Dark Dimension, the Old West, the year 3000, the Scarlet Centurion's divergent Earth, the 1940s, Earth-Q of the Squadron Supreme, and even Limbo.

So, without further ado, we present this examination of the Avengers' adventures in alternate Realities.

Stan Lee, "The Coming of the Avengers," *Avengers* #1, September 1963. Exiled to the Isle of Silence in Asgard, Loki sends mental projections of himself to Marvel-Earth (Earth-M) in an attempt to coerce Thor into unwittingly aiding his escape. Loki succeeds in gaining the Teen Brigade's attention by manipulating the Hulk. The teenagers' call for help reaches not only Thor, but also Iron Man, Ant-Man, and the Wasp. Thor travels to Asgard, battles Loki, and brings him to Earth, where the combined efforts of the later-named Avengers defeat him. Asgard, because of its mythological nature, can be considered to be a fractional dimension, with the Rainbow Bridge acting as a nexus between it and Earth-M.

Stan Lee, "The Space Phantom," *Avengers* #2, November 1963. The Space Phantom, a member of the scouting party for an alien race bent on conquering Earth, is able to assume other people's identities while banishing them to Limbo. He states, "Two beings who are exactly the same cannot occupy the same world. So when I take any creature's identity, that creature is instantly transported to Limbo." Since there is no Omniversal law denying the co-existence of identical counterparts, the Space Phantom's ability would appear to be an innate ability he does not fully comprehend. After sending the other Avengers to Limbo and back, the Phantom learns to his chagrin that his power has no effect on Thor—a god, not a mortal—and he *himself* is consigned to Limbo. This selectivity factor corroborates the fact that the ability has nothing to do with natural laws. Limbo is the realm of zero vibration rate outside the timestream.

Stan Lee, "Their Darkest Hour," *Avengers* #7, August 1964. The Enchantress and the Executioner are banished to Earth by Odin. There they team up with Baron Zemo and attack the Avengers. Thor expels the trio from Earth using his hammer Mjolnir, which creates a "space warp" depositing them, as we later learn, "between the sixth and the seventh dimensions"—arbitrary designations.

Stan Lee, "Kang the Conqueror," *Avengers* #8, September 1964. Time-traveling from an alternate future of the year 4000, Kang attempts to "conquer the 20th Century" but is defeated by the Avengers, who destroy his uniform's built-in weaponry with an acid-based solvent. Kang makes mention of the fact that in a former era he was called Rama-Tut. (For a detailed look at Kang and his counterparts, see F. Lovece's "The Lives and Times of Doctor Doom" in this issue.) Kang escapes into the timestream.

Stan Lee, "The Coming of Wonder Man," *Avengers* #9, October 1964. Trapped between the "sixth and seventh dimensions," a nebulous region that looks like inter-dimensional space, the Enchantress, Executioner, and Baron Zemo are rescued by the Enchantress' spell, which transports them back to Earth-M.

Stan Lee, "The Avengers Break Up," *Avengers* #10, November 1964. Immortus, self-proclaimed Master of Time and Ruler of Limbo, mentally contacts the Enchantress to offer his aid in her battle with the Avengers. Immortus then dispatches Rick Jones to 18th Century London, England, to lure Captain America and the rest of the Avengers into battle against Attila the Hun, Merlin, Hercules, and Goliath. (Judging by appearances, the Hercules seen here may not be the same being who later joins the Avengers.) His lackeys defeated, Immortus sends Captain America to the 18th Century to rescue Rick Jones. Meanwhile, in the 20th Century, the Avengers begin to battle the Enchantress, Executioner, and Zemo. Finally, Immortus causes Captain America and Rick Jones to reappear in the 20th Century, just in time to join the Avengers in their battle. On the verge of defeat, the Enchantress uses a spell to take them all back through time to before her first contact with Immortus. This time she breaks contact with Immortus and averts the events that she remembers will take place. Although it is not specified in the story, what she has done is diverge an alternate Reality, one in which Immortus did not get involved. It is interesting to note that the Enchantress did not meet herself, doubling back in time as she did, and that Immortus, the Master of Time, would fall for such a simple time trick. (For more on Immortus, also see F. Lovece's article in this issue.)

Stan Lee, "Spider-Man," *Avengers* #11, December 1964. Seeking revenge on the Avengers for his previous defeat, Kang creates a Spider-Man robot and sends it back in time a thousand years. As Kang watches from his laboratory with a monitoring device able to peer through time, the real Spider-Man exposes the robot. It is interesting to note that Kang is said to reside in the year 3000, rather than 4000 as in his prior appearance.

Stan Lee, "This Hostage Earth," *Avengers* #12, January 1965. The Red Ghost makes himself and the Mole Man intangible to avoid capture. Apparently the Ghost's cosmic-ray-wrought abilities allow him to maintain others as well as himself at unactualized vibration rates.

Stan Lee, "The Old Order Changeth," *Avengers* #16, May 1965. The Avengers resort to "Plan D" in which Thor uses Mjolnir to trans-

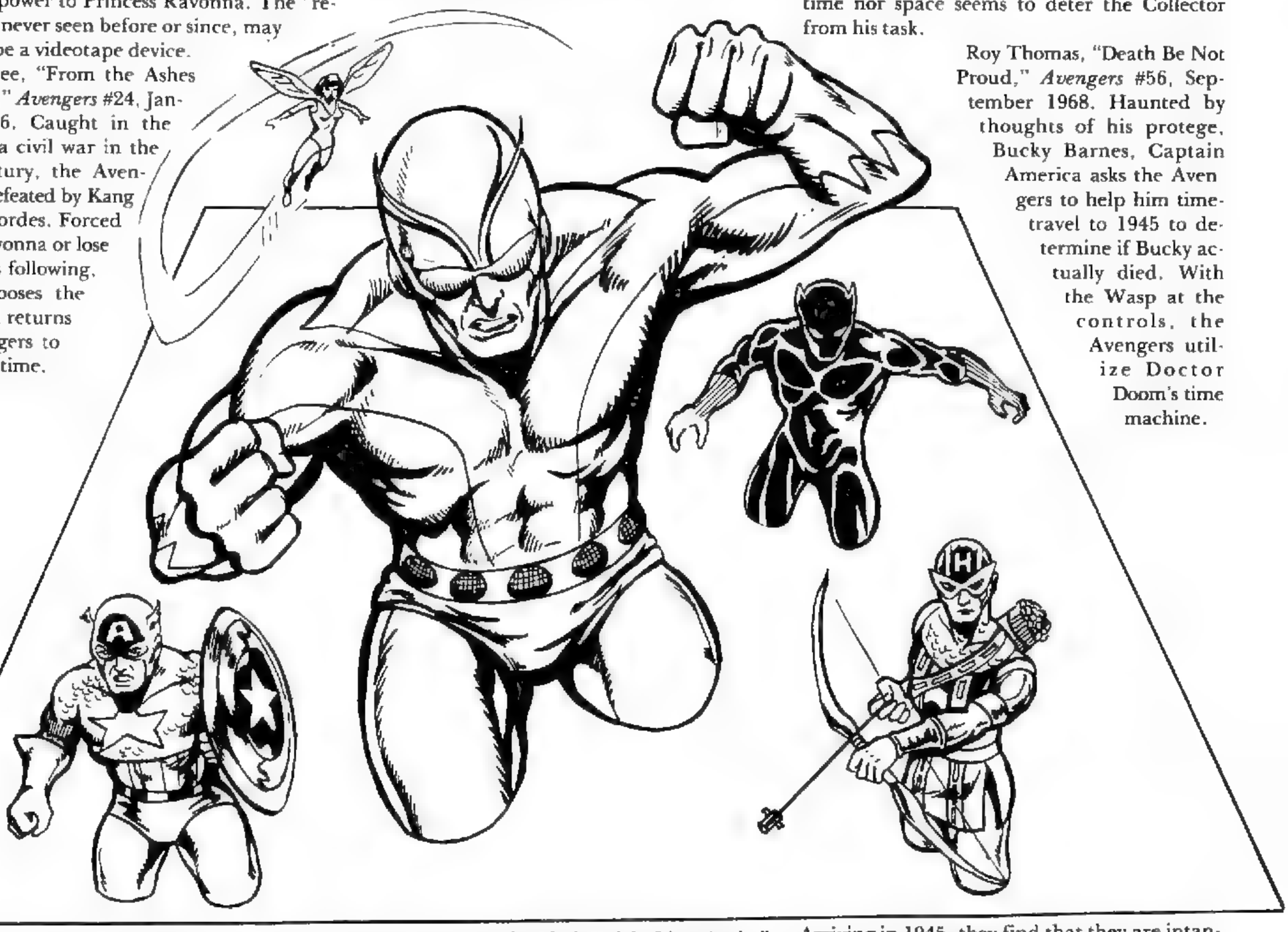
port his allies and the Melter and the Black Knight to another dimension, so that innocent bystanders will not be harmed. The nature of this particular dimension is undisclosed.

Stan Lee, "Once an Avenger," *Avengers* #23, December 1965. Kang sends a time-traveling ship of his own invention from the 31st Century to the 20th to capture Hawkeye, Quicksilver, and the Scarlet Witch. Using the Avengers' "Recreator," a device which enables one to play back recent events, Captain America discovers what happened just as Kang transports him to the future, too. Kang's intent is to prove his love and power to Princess Ravonna. The "recreator," never seen before or since, may well just be a videotape device.

Stan Lee, "From the Ashes of Defeat," *Avengers* #24, January 1966. Caught in the midst of a civil war in the 31st Century, the Avengers are defeated by Kang and his hordes. Forced to kill Ravonna or lose his army's following, Kang chooses the latter and returns the Avengers to their own time.

Roy Thomas, "The Monstrous Master Plan of the Mandarin," *Avengers Annual* #1, September 1967. The Executioner whirls his axe, transporting himself, the Enchantress, Hercules, and the Scarlet Witch to a "world between the worlds." While its exact nature was not disclosed, this dimension may well be a mythological one, to judge by its Citadel of Silence.

Roy Thomas, "Magneto Walks the Earth," *Avengers* #47, December 1967. Desiring to regain favor with his father, Hercules travels to Olympus and finds it deserted.



Roy Thomas, "In the Clutches of the Collector," *Avengers* #51, March 1968. The Collector materializes on Earth M from parts unknown and drugs Thor with an obedience potion derived from Asgardian herbs. Neither time nor space seems to deter the Collector from his task.

Roy Thomas, "Death Be Not Proud," *Avengers* #56, September 1968. Haunted by thoughts of his protege, Bucky Barnes, Captain America asks the Avengers to help him time-travel to 1945 to determine if Bucky actually died. With the Wasp at the controls, the Avengers utilize Doctor Doom's time machine.

Stan Lee, "Enter...Doctor Doom," *Avengers* #25, February 1966. Plotting to attack the Avengers, Doctor Doom ponders his relationship with Kang, but reaches no conclusions.

Stan Lee, "Among Us Walks...a Goliath," *Avengers* #28, May 1966. On the verge of defeat, the Collector transports himself and the Beetle to "Else-Time" with a time machine he collected in his travels

Roy Thomas, "In Our Midst...an Immortal," *Avengers* #38, March 1967. Drugged by the Enchantress with a drink from the Fountain of Eros, Hercules travels from Olympus to Earth to battle the Avengers. Finally freed of the love spell, Hercules forces the Enchantress to leave Earth. Zeus appears through a dimensional gulf to pass the edict that Hercules be exiled from Olympus for a year. Olympus, like Asgard, is a fractional dimension.

Roy Thomas, "The Black Knight Lives Again," *Avengers* #48, January 1968. Searching Olympus, Hercules finds no clue to the whereabouts of his former compatriots.

Roy Thomas, "Mine Is the Power," *Avengers* #49, February 1968. Hercules discovers that Typhon, once banished from Olympus by Zeus, has stolen the Promethean Flame, consigning all Olympians to the Realm of Shades. Using the power of the Flame imbued in his battle-axe, Typhon transports Hercules there as well.

Roy Thomas, "To Tame a Titan," *Avengers* #50, March 1968. Hercules discovers his father Zeus and the rest of the Olympians in the Realm of Shades. Zeus tells his son that since Hercules is half mortal, *he* can leave the Realm while the immortals cannot. This attribute, explained no further, may indicate that the Realm of Shades may be a dimension traversable only by mortals. Sent to Earth, Hercules defeats Typhon and escorts the renegade god back to Olympus. There, Hercules rekindles the Promethean Flame, restoring the gods of Olympus to their rightful dimension. Typhon is then hurled into the abyss that leads to Pluto's domain of the dead, ostensibly a different realm of shades than the one in which the Olympians had been imprisoned.

Arriving in 1945, they find that they are intangible, indicating that they retained their 1968 vibration rate after their journey outside the timestream, a pre-actualized vibration rate for 1945. However, when the Wasp mysteriously falls asleep at the controls, she presses a button that apparently attunes their vibration rates to that of 1945, and the Avengers materialize. It is significant to note that we have two Captain America counterparts co-existing at the same time in proximity to one another, with no paradoxical side effects. This supports the Omniversal tenet that paradox is impossible in a multiple Reality Line system. Before becoming intangible again and being whisked back to his rightful time era with his compatriots, Captain America manages to sever the ropes binding his younger counterpart and Bucky with his shield. Needless to say, the Avengers' interference in the past diverged an alternate Reality Line, coincidentally the one

that brought forth the 1968 Captain America. The star-spangled avenger of the present recalls that a mysterious version of his shield did free him back in 1945.

Roy Thomas, "And Time, the Rushing River," *Avengers Annual* #2, 1968. Returning from their 1945 time adventure the Avengers discover that no one has ever heard of them. Not only that, but the original team of Avengers is still assembled, and at the instruction of the Scarlet Centurion, they have wiped out every other super-powered being on Earth. After battling their predecessors (during which Goliath meets another self with no paradoxical side effects, either), Goliath tampers with the controls of Doctor Doom's time machine, and causes both the Scarlet Centurion and his fellow Avengers to dematerialize. Returned to their rightful Reality, the Avengers have their memories cleansed of the incident by the dutiful Watcher, who informs us that the Centurion is another counterpart of Kang/Rama-Tut. Never referred to as such, this chronicle is the first alternate Earth story that Marvel did, and although it was seemingly "undone" at the story's end, even the Watcher now knows that Reality never simplifies itself but just keeps getting more diverse.

Roy Thomas, "Some Say the World Will End in Fire, Some Say in Ice," *Avengers* #61, February 1969. The spell of Fire and Ice uttered by Marduk of the Sons of Satannish in *Dr. Strange* #178 releases Surtur and Ymir, the Fire and Ice Demons of Norse legend. With the aid of Dr. Strange, the Avengers defeat the pair, sending them back to Asgard.

Roy Thomas, "Let the Game Begin," *Avengers* #69, October 1969. Kang accepts the challenge of the cosmic gambler, the Grandmaster, in hopes of gaining the ability to revive his beloved Ravonna from suspended animation. Transporting the Avengers and a wounded Tony Stark to his alternate future of 3000, Kang pits them against the Grandmaster's champions, the Squadron Sinister (Dr. Spectrum, Hyperion, Nighthawk, and the Whizzer). The teams of heroes are dispatched back to the 20th Century to do battle.

Roy Thomas, "When Strikes the Squadron Sinister," *Avengers* #70, November 1969. Thor, Goliath, Captain America, and Iron Man battle the Squadron Sinister in the four corners of the Earth. When the Black Knight interferes with Goliath's fight with the Whizzer, the Grandmaster recalls all the contestants as well as the Black Knight's Ebony Blade to the 31st Century, declaring the match a stalemate.

Roy Thomas, "Endgame," *Avengers* #71, December 1969. Kang sends the Vision, Yellowjacket, and the Black Panther to occupied France in the 1940s, where they battle the Grandmaster's unwitting pawns: Sub-Mariner, the Human Torch, and Captain America. Defeating the Invaders, the Avengers are retrieved to the year 3000. Victorious in but one of the games, Kang is granted the power of life or death by the Grandmaster. He chooses the death of the Avengers over the life of Ravonna. However, during this second battle, the Black Knight in the 20th Century contacts the spirit of his ancestor, Sir Percy of Scandia, and through his psychic link with his Ebony Blade, is transported to 3000. Regaining the Blade, the Knight knocks Kang unconscious before he is able to kill the Avengers. The tableau played out, the Avengers and the Black Knight are returned to their native eras. Sir Percy apparently resides in one of the various realms of shades adjacent to Earth-M.

Roy Thomas, "Did You Hear the One About Scorpio?" *Avengers* #72, January 1970. Captain Marvel is glimpsed in the anti-matter dimension of the Negative Zone as Rick Jones, in a symbiotic link with the Kreeman, fights alongside the Avengers against Zodiac.

Roy Thomas, "The Warlord and the Witch," *Avengers* #75, April 1970. Arkon, ruler of a parallel Earth whose light source has been dwindling for twenty years, discovers that nuclear explosions on Earth-M can supply the necessary energy to restore his world's life-giving energy rings. Informed by one of his scientists that he can send inanimate objects between the two parallel worlds, Arkon teleports a book containing a spell which enables dimension travel when spoken by one "born of the atom." The tome is found by the mutant Scarlet Witch, who is attempting to regain her diminishing powers. Snatching the Scarlet Witch and the Toad to his world, Arkon then captures a group of Earth-M's nuclear scientists, demanding that they produce a bomb. Atomic energy is shown to be yet another way to breach the vibrational barrier between dimensions.

Roy Thomas, "The Blaze of Battle...the Flame of Love," *Avengers* #76, May 1970. To rescue the Scarlet Witch, the Avengers travel to Arkon's world by courtesy of Thor's hammer after their experimental D-Machine doesn't work. There they find that Arkon has gone to Earth-M to cause a nuclear holocaust. Returning to confront Arkon, the Avengers are interrupted by a projection that shows that Iron Man, remaining on Arkon's world, has devised a way to restore the energy rings that are the world's light source. As Arkon returns home,

Scarlet Witch finds that her powers have been restored. Although it is never elaborated upon, it is possible that they were augmented by the atomic energy used in dimension travel.

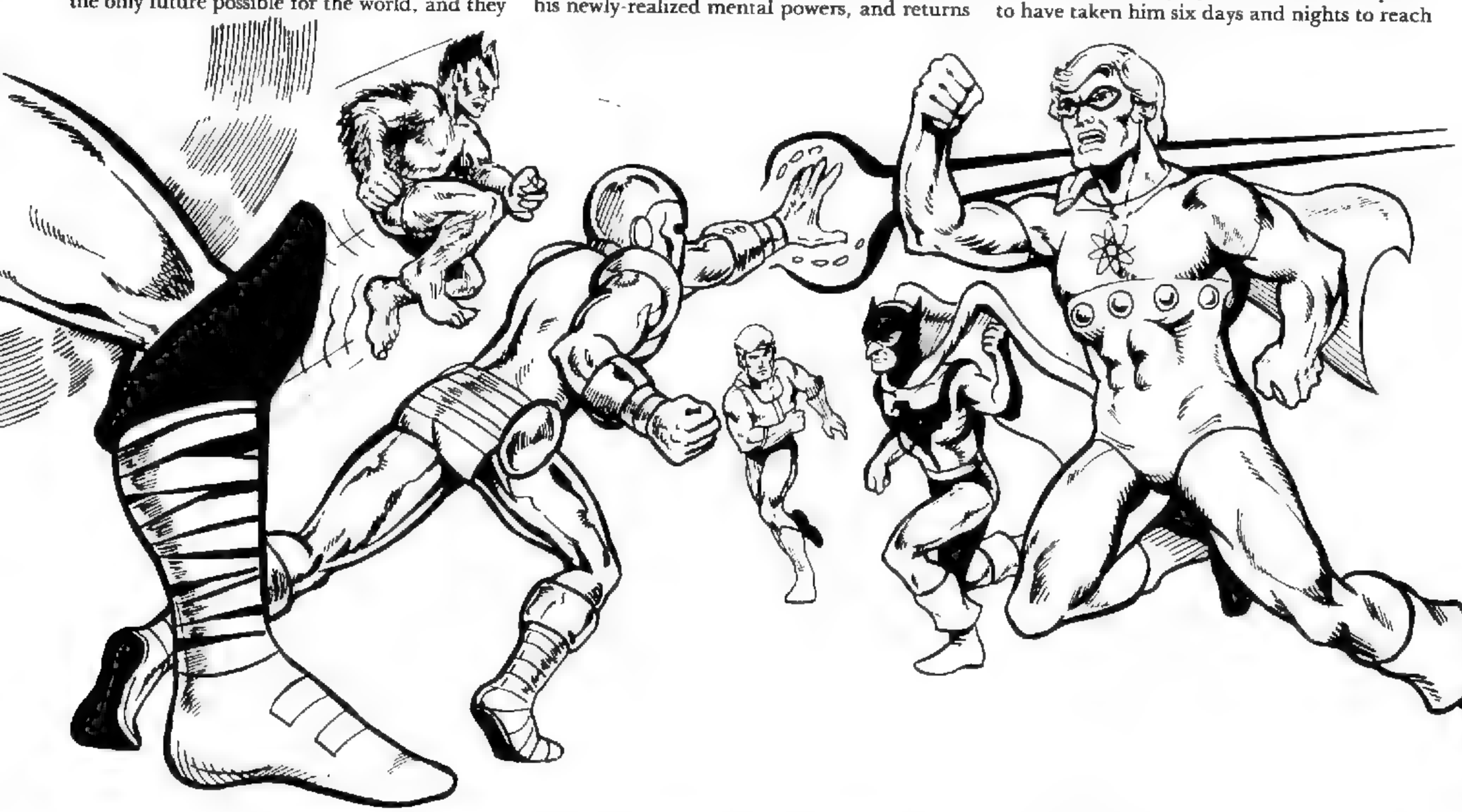
Roy Thomas, "The Coming of Red Wolf," *Avengers* #80, September 1970. After his parents are killed, Will Talltrees performs the Dance of the Red Wolf, calling upon the spirit of a 19th Century Indian savior. Imbued with his spirit, Talltrees becomes the new Red Wolf. The spirit obviously dwells in one of the realms of shades adjacent to Earth-M.

Roy Thomas, "Come On In...the Revolution's Fine," *Avengers* #83, December 1970. Her powers halved by Odin's hand, the Enchantress travels to Earth from the netherworld in which she was imprisoned. There, she and the Executioner learn of an experimental "parallel-time projector," which she hopes will allow her access to Asgard where she can regain her full powers. The Enchantress vanishes when the Scarlet Witch's hex sphere turns her spell against her. Since the Enchantress seemed to be able to dimension-travel to places other than Asgard, apparently the fact that she could not go to Asgard was due to Odin's spell.

Roy Thomas, "The Sword and the Sorceress," *Avengers* #84, January 1971. Finding herself on Arkon's world, the Enchantress convinces Arkon that the Avengers mean to attack him. Meanwhile, the Black Knight is sent to Arkon's world by a mysterious hag at Stonehenge. Fearing the sentience of his Ebony Blade, the Black Knight is instructed to throw it into the Well at the Center of Time, apparently a dimensional nexus. Appearing to aid Arkon, the Enchantress transports some Avengers to that world. In the midst of battle, Arkon realizes the Enchantress' infidelity, and the Black Knight thrusts the Blade into the Well. The Enchantress disappears for parts unknown and the Avengers return home.

Roy Thomas, "The World is Not For Burning," *Avengers* #85, February 1971. The remaining Avengers are dismayed when Scarlet

Witch, Quicksilver, Vision, and Goliath do not return with them from Arkon's world. The quartet finds themselves intangible on a parallel world similar to their own, except that it is dying from an expanding sun. Discovering that they are two weeks in the future relative to their own time, they are brought back to the present by Scarlet Witch's hex sphere, which also adjusts their respective vibration rates so that they are tangible to that world. They soon discover that the Squadron Supreme is the resident super-hero team of this parallel Earth (which we have labeled "Earth-Q" for convenience) and that Hubert Humphrey is president. Guessing that a solar rocket invented by the mutated Brain-Child will be the cause of the catastrophe they previewed, the Avengers attempt to enlist the Squadron's aid to abort the rocket's launching. Apparently the Avengers are aware that their future vision is not the only future possible for the world, and they



hope to diverge a Reality where the sun does not enlarge. It is of Omniversal interest to note that four members of the Squadron Supreme have counterparts on Earth-M thanks to the Grandmaster. It seems likely, since the Squadron Supreme spontaneously evolved and the Squadron Sinister were created, that the Grandmaster must have seen the Earth-Q heroes in his many travels and modeled the Earth-M villains after them.

Roy Thomas, "Brain-Child to the Dark Tower Came," *Avengers* #86, March 1971. Allied with the Squadron Supreme, the Avengers defeat Brain-Child and find themselves in an alternate future of their own making. The combined efforts of Thor's Mjolnir and Tony Stark's inventions return the four Avengers to Earth-M. The Vision, musing on their adventure, asks, "But how can we be certain that we have not been rescued by a third world – one all but identical to our own?"

Roy Thomas, "The Only Good Alien," *Avengers* #89, June 1971. After switching atoms with Captain Marvel in the Negative Zone, Rick Jones returns to Earth-M through the dimensional portal in the Baxter Building. Annihilus, ruler of that anti-matter Reality, follows Rick to Earth-M, but is quickly dispatched back through the artificial nexus.

Roy Thomas, "The Andromeda Swarm," *Avengers* #96, February 1972. As part of his grand scheme to regain control of the Kree Empire, the Supreme Intelligence (Supremor) sends Rick Jones from the Kree homeworld back to the Negative Zone.

Roy Thomas, "Godhood's End," *Avengers* #97, March 1972. In the Negative Zone, Rick Jones encounters and defeats Annihilus with his newly-realized mental powers, and returns to the Kree homeworld by an artificial nexus fashioned by Supremor. Supremor notes that all people of Earth-M shall realize such latent ability "in some distant, unglimpsed future," carefully wording his statement so as not to imply "all" possible futures. (See F. Lovece's "Marvel Omnipotents and Omniversal Awareness" in *Omniverse* #1 for further discussion of the Supreme Intelligence.) With Rick's life force expended, Captain Marvel merges with the youth, sending his body back to the Negative Zone.

Roy Thomas, "Let Slip the Dogs of War," *Avengers* #98, April 1972. Ares, the God of War in Olympus, assumes the guise of Mr. Tallon on Earth-M to incite the masses to riot. Attacked by the Avengers, he escapes to Olympus while conjuring a spell which bars Thor from setting foot in Asgard.

Roy Thomas, "They First Make Mad," *Avengers* #99, May 1972. Kratos and Bia, two demigods sent to Earth-M by Ares, capture Hercules and bring him to Olympus.

Roy Thomas, "Whatever Gods There Be," *Avengers* #100, June 1972. The Black Knight summons the spirit of his ancestor, Sir Percy, from its netherworld to learn the fate of his Ebony Blade, thrown into the Well at the Center of Time in *Avengers* #84. Sir Percy relates how the blade materialized in Olympus and was used by Ares to strike the Promethean Flame. That all of the Olympians except Hercules and himself were turned to crystal rather than dispatched to the Realm of Shades (as in *Avengers* #49) surprised even Ares. Perhaps as wielder of the Blade he was unaffected. Hercules' half-mortal heritage probably spared him as it did the last time. Ares then threw Hercules from Olympus, where it is reputed to have taken him six days and nights to reach Earth-M. Why the journey between dimensions took so long was undisclosed, although Sir Percy, in relating the events, may have been mistaken on that account. The tale concluded, the Black Knight enlists the aid of the Avengers, who mount fronts against Ares in both Olympus and London, where Olympian vassals appear through a nexus. Thor and Hercules manage to seal the artificial nexus with their fists; apparently their godly powers cancelled the magic by which Ares opened it.

Roy Thomas and Harlan Ellison, "Five Dooms to Save Tomorrow," *Avengers* #101, July 1972. A man named Leonard Tippit is duped by the Watcher into attempting to slay five people who he is told will inadvertently cause a nuclear holocaust to occur "in each of Earth's possible tomorrows." The Watcher explains to Tippit, "Unimaginative mortals have oft compared

time to a flowing river...In truth it is more like unto a tree with many roots. All those roots reach up to converge in the single tree, which is the world you know. From the trunk, they then branch out again into the limbs of the tree—each limb a different time, a variant future." This tree metaphor is misleading in that it implies that any number of pasts (roots) can bring forth the same present (a trunk), when in reality, one and only one sequence of events can produce a particular Reality. The Watcher goes on to say, "There are things I call focal-elements...things which belong equally to each of the possible time-branches. Sometimes it may be a grain of sand...a lizard or newt...a cloud formation...even, on occasions, a human being. You are one of those focal-elements. You are neither of one time nor another." While it is possible that inanimate and nonsentient objects may enter into a Divergent Factor, most often—if not always—divergences are effected by Diversifals, rational beings whose actions are determined by free will. The Watcher goes on to explain, "The future is ofttimes mine to see, but never to a fact except in the most indirect ways. And I see a holocaust coming—a terrible nuclear war, in *each* of Earth's possible tomorrows. It is an inevitable, inescapable war—so deadly it will cut across all time-lines, all branches of the time-tree, turning all possible tomorrows into empty arid wastelands..." This statement is, of course, blatantly erroneous, since an event such as a nuclear war would be significant enough to cause a divergence in Reality, creating an alternate world in which the nuclear war was averted. Hence, even with an event pervasive enough to spread across all of the Reality Lines of a multiverse, it could only affect half of the possible futures. In the end, the Watcher tips his hand and shows that it is Tippit himself who is the threat to the future, and his actions were just a ploy to get the Avengers to subdue him. The Watcher states, "I dared not even touch him before, because of the power he unwittingly possessed. That touching would have ravaged the Earth as surely as any holocaust." Apparently the Watcher forgets that it was he who released Tippit's latent resources in the first place. By removing Leonard Tippit from Earth, the Watcher succeeded in averting whatever catastrophe the man may or may not have caused for one future, but by doing so, the Watcher diverged a Reality in which he did not interfere. As in the example of the nuclear war, even if the Watcher stopped by every Reality Line in the multiverse, he could do no better than remove Tippit from half of them. All things considered, the Watcher's statements and actions in this episode are more muddled and meaningless than in any account of the Watcher to date.

Roy Thomas, "The Sentinels Are Alive and Well," *Avengers* #103, September 1972. Larry Trask, the precognitive son of the Sentinels' creator, sees into an alternate future in which all human life is destroyed when the mutant-hunting Sentinels sterilize mankind.

Roy Thomas, "With a Bang—and a Whimper," *Avengers* #104, October 1972. Believing his vision to be inevitable, Larry Trask travels with Quicksilver to the Sentinels' laboratory in Australia. The Avengers defeat the Sentinels and diverge a Reality in which human life is neither destroyed nor sterilized from the equally real alternate future Trask saw.

Steve Englehart, "A Traitor Stalks Among Us," *Avengers* #106, December 1972. Investigating the scene of a battle with Hydra that Captain America forgot he had, the Avengers are attacked by the Space Phantom, up to his old impersonating tricks.

Steve Englehart, "The Master Plan of the Space Phantom," *Avengers* #107, January 1973. The Avengers learn that the Space Phantom returned from Limbo when Jane Foster was sent there by Loki in *Journey Into Mystery* #108, 109.

Steve Englehart, "Check—and Mate," *Avengers* #108, February 1973. Tricked into attempting to send Rick Jones to Limbo, the Space Phantom is himself teleported there, since his abilities do not allow for transporting two people at once, and Rick Jones' total being is intertwined with that of Captain Marvel.

Steve Englehart, "The Lion God Lives," *Avengers* #112, June 1973. The Lion God, apparently hailing from some mythological dimension, attacks the Avengers to vanquish the Black Panther, embodiment of his rival, the Panther God. He is banished from Earth-M when Thor calls upon the power of the elements to course through the Lion God's totem.

Steve Englehart, "Night of the Swordsman," *Avengers* #114, August 1973. Mantis mentally contacts the Lion God and aids in his travel to Earth-M so she and Swordsman can defeat him to prove their worth to the Avengers. The Lion God is hypnotized by Mantis, placed in an adamantium cylinder and transported by Thor to an unspecified dimension.

Steve Englehart, "Below Us, the Battle," *Avengers* #115, September 1973. Dormammu, searching for an ally, teleports Loki to his Dark Dimension through the "channels of time" so none would suspect. Having learned of the Evil Eye (last seen in *Fantastic Four* #54), Dormammu believes it to have "power enough to expand my dimension until it swallows that of Earth." Apparently Dormammu is unaware that two Realities vibrating at different and distinct rates are unable to merge. Perhaps what he meant was that he intended to make

Earth-M a "dark dimension" like his own, one governed by chaos instead of order.

Steve Englehart, "Betrayal," *Avengers* #116, October 1973. Loki sends a projection of himself to warn Thor that Dormammu intends to subjugate Asgard as well as Earth.

Steve Englehart, "Holocaust," *Avengers* #117, November 1973. Dormammu and Loki are seen in the Dark Dimension, whose magical nature classifies it as having a fractional vibration rate.

Steve Englehart, "To the Death," *Avengers* #118, December 1973. Dormammu uses the power of the Evil Eye to "merge" his dimension with Earth-M, changing humanity into demons.

Steve Englehart, "Bid Tomorrow Goodbye," *Avengers* #129, November 1974. With the appearance of the Dawn Star "above" Avengers Mansion, Kang the Conqueror travels to the 20th Century to mate with the Celestial Madonna in order to become the most powerful man on Earth. Kang explains that few 20th Century records survived to his time, and "electro-static disturbances in [the Avengers'] branch of the timestream" prevented him from pinpointing the date of the Star's advent more precisely. For a time traveler with such experience, Kang's statements here, and later on, are not very learned. As he shows in the immediate future (*Giant-Size Avengers* #4), quick jumps through time are easy enough for him to accomplish, and by this method he should be able to pinpoint the exact second of the Dawn Star's appearance. Perhaps being so obsessed with the Celestial Madonna, Kang failed to make full use of his science. Once he arrives in the 20th Century, Kang captures the Avengers and brings them to the pyramid of a former self, Rama-Tut.

Steve Englehart, "A Blast From the Past," *Giant-Size Avengers* #2, November 1974. Awakening in the 20th Century, Rama-Tut explains to Hawkeye the chronology of events by which Kang became Rama-Tut: at sixty years of age, Kang tired of warring in the 40th Century and returned to ancient Egypt, destroyed his timesphere, and resumed the guise of the Pharaoh Rama-Tut. At seventy, Tut placed himself in suspended animation to awaken when the Swordsman entered the pyramid to search for his fellow Avengers. The two counterparts, Kang and Tut, confront one another, providing further evidence that the same person can coexist with himself at the same instant. Tut hopes to thwart his own past by preventing Kang's union with the Celestial Madonna. Tut finds himself enacting what he remembers happened when he was his former self, Kang. He tells Kang that he cannot avoid becoming the remembered past of the aged Tut because "future events will inevitably lead you here." Again, Kang/Tut suffers from a misconception: while Tut is living proof that *a* Kang will become him, there is no way to know if this particular Kang, and not some divergent counterpart, will complete the circuit. It is erroneous for Tut to think that in a multiverse of possibilities, all of Kang's roads lead to Tut. Kang and Tut are teleported into the timestream when a lever in the timesphere is accidentally pulled in the heat of battle.

Steve Englehart, "A Quiet Half-Hour in Saigon," *Avengers* #131, January 1975. Kang and Tut materialize in Immortus' castle in Limbo. There, the Master of Limbo imprisons Tut and gives Kang access to a machine to summon beings from the past. Kang assembles the Frankenstein Monster, Wonder Man, the original Human Torch, Midnight, Baron Zemo, and the Flying Dutchman's Ghost to fight the Avengers in Immortus' castle.

Steve Englehart and Roy Thomas, "Kang War II," *Avengers* #132, February 1975. The Avengers battle the Legion of the Unliving in Limbo, with Kang, Rama-Tut, and Immortus as witnesses.

Steve Englehart and Roy Thomas, "What Time Hath Put Asunder," *Giant-Size Avengers* #3, February 1975. In the course of battle, Iron Man is killed, but since time does not pass in Limbo, Immortus is able to restore him to life. The original Human Torch and the Vision discover that they both possess the same android body. After battling Thor, Kang leaves Immortus' abode to hide elsewhere in the timestream. Immortus reveals that he is another future counterpart of Kang and Rama-Tut.

Steve Englehart, "Yesterday and Beyond," *Avengers* #133, March 1975. As recompense for their aid in teaching Kang a lesson, Immortus gives the Avengers synchro-staffs to guide them through history. The Vision is sent through time to November 1939 to learn how he used to be the original Human Torch, while Thor, Iron Man, Hawkeye, and Mantis are sent to the Kree Year Zero to learn the secret of the Celestial Madonna. The staff tells them, "Non-interference is paramount! The interjection of uncontemporaneous elements can pollute the timestream." Which, in Omniversal terms, simply means that the actions of time travelers can cause divergences. To prevent them from interfering, the staff keeps them invisible and intangible by not synchronizing their vibration rates with that of the era. With the Avengers sent into time, Immortus admits to himself that he has known five lives, that he is one of five distinct counterparts.

Steve Englehart, "The Times That Bind," *Avengers* #134, April 1975. While the Vision visits 1949 and 1966 to learn more of his past, Thor, Mantis, Hawkeye and Iron Man continue their journey to the Kree Year 476, where they view the migration of two pacifist Kree and a Cotati to Earth. The quartet is suddenly wrenched to present day Viet Nam, where they find Libra and the body of the Swordsman animated by a Cotati.

Steve Englehart, "The Torch is Passed," *Avengers* #135, May 1975. As the Vision witnesses his past prior to his awakening in his current form, Moondragon and Immortus join the others in Viet Nam.

Steve Englehart, "Let All Men Bring Together," *Giant-Size Avengers* #4, June 1975. Upon completion of his personal history lesson, the Vision finds himself teleported to Dormammu's Dark Dimension. There he discovers the Scarlet Witch and Agatha Harkness entrapped by the Dreaded One and his sister, Umar. After Scarlet Witch humbles Dormammu with her newly-mastered abilities, they all return to Earth-M. Meanwhile, Kang makes four quick time-jumps to decoy the Avengers while he abducts the Celestial Madonna. Immortus orders his subject, the Space Phantom, to assume the guise of Mantis, and it is him that Kang abducts, not the real Celestial Madonna.

Steve Englehart, "We Do Seek Out New Avengers," *Avengers* #137, July 1975. Hawkeye vows to locate the Black Knight in the 12th Century via Doctor Doom's time machine, to determine whether he wants to become an Avenger.

Steve Englehart, "Stranger in a Strange Man," *Avengers* #138, August 1975. The Toad explains to the Avengers that he constructed a ship, as he had seen Magneto do, which enabled him to travel from Arkon's dimensional world to the prison-planet of the Stranger. The nature of this ship was not disclosed.

Steve Englehart, "A Journey to the Center of the Ant," *Avengers* #140, October 1975. Searching Doctor Doom's castle for the missing Hawkeye, Moondragon and Iron Man witness the time platform return empty, save for a spattering of blood.

Steve Englehart, "The Phantom Empire," *Avengers* #141, November 1975. Moondragon and Thor contact Immortus to learn if Kang had anything to do with Hawkeye's disappearance. Immortus leads the two to 1873, the year to which Kang fled from them. Meanwhile, in the 20th Century, the rest of the Avengers are prowling Brand Corporation when they are defeated by the Squadron Supreme of Earth-Q.

Steve Englehart, "Go West, Young Gods," *Avengers* #142, December 1975. In 1873, Thor, Moondragon, and Immortus meet the Two-Gun Kid, Rawhide Kid, Ringo Kid, Kid Colt, and Night Rider, who lead them to the missing Hawkeye. The archer tells them how Kang was waiting for him in the timestream and an arrow of his upset their journey, depositing them in 1873. Immortus learns that Kang's new master plan is to conquer the *19th* Century, and hence the 20th as well. Hawkeye ignorantly exclaims, "[Then we'll] all cease to be!" without considering that Kang's control of the 19th Century would cause a divergence such that the Earth he ruled a hundred years later would not be the one from which the Avengers came.

Steve Englehart, "Right Between the Eons," *Avengers* #143, January 1976. In combat with Thor, Kang increases his temporal energy to such a level that his atoms disintegrate and he is dispersed "throughout all time." Immortus tells the Avengers, "Now, Kang no longer exists...and Rama-Tut shall never come into being. Neither, too, shall Immortus have been. The circle is broken. We are free." Although a poignant speech, it is an outright lie. The disintegration of Kang on one Reality Line does not affect in the least his future counterparts, Rama Tut and Immortus. While it may be true that the Kang who disintegrated did not become anyone else, there are countless possible Kangs, who diverged at critical points

in his existence, one of whom *did* become Rama-Tut and Immortus, by evidence of past issues. Taking into account Immortus/Kang/Rama-Tut's many previous erroneous statements to the Avengers, it is obvious that the Master of Time had some reason to mislead them. In *Thor* #282, we learn that Immortus does indeed still live, and that his farewell speech was designed to let the Avengers know that the threat of Kang has passed for a time.

Steve Englehart, "Claws," *Avengers* #144, February 1976. While Thor, Moondragon, Hawkeye, and the Two-Gun Kid return to the 20th Century, Hugh Jones of Brand Corporation sends the other Avengers and the Squadron Supreme to Earth-Q.

Steve Englehart, "Crisis on Other-Earth," *Avengers* #147, May 1976. On Earth-Q, the Avengers, Beast, and Hellcat discover that Nelson Rockefeller, the president of the United States on this parallel Earth, wears a Serpent Crown similar to that of Hugh Jones on their home Earth. Rockefeller contacts Jones across the inter-dimensional void, and it is learned that there are Serpent Crowns "scattered throughout the myriad realms of reality." The Avengers learn that the Squadron was deceived into obeying the possessor of the Crown.

Steve Englehart, "20,000 Leagues Under Justice," *Avengers* #148, June 1976. Battling the Squadron, the Avengers locate a dimensional machine with which they can return to Earth-M.

Steve Englehart, "The Gods and the Gang," *Avengers* #149, July 1976. Under siege by the Avengers, Hugh Jones contacts the Earth-Q Rockefeller to discover why the Squadron failed to defeat the Avengers. He learns that the Earth-M heroes convinced the Earth-Q heroes that their nation's leader was being controlled by a multidimensional serpentine entity.

Jim Shooter, "The Demi-God Must Die," *Avengers* #163, September 1977. Typhon makes a pact with Pluto, ruler of Hades, whereby he would be set free if he delivers Hercules in his place. When it becomes apparent that Typhon has failed, Pluto recalls him to Hades.

Jim Shooter, "Tomorrow Dies Today," *Avengers* #167, January 1978. The Guardians of the Galaxy travel from the 31st Century to the 20th to stop Korvac the Machine Man from killing Guardian Vance Astro's child counterpart. Iron Man states, "[If Korvac] eliminates young Vance Astro, he'll be creating an alternate future in which he can rule unopposed, because the Guardians won't ever come to be." This statement accurately reflects the Omniversal truth that killing Astro as a boy would *not* prevent the Guardians from coming into existence, but would only create an alternate Reality in which they do not. However, Astro himself does not seem to be overly educated as to the nature of time (nor do the Avengers who do not correct his misconception): "I know from past experience that I don't dare set foot on Earth in this era. Two of me on Earth at once would mess up the timestream without help from Korvac." This statement is patently false; not only have other heroes proved that it is possible to coexist with one's past or alternate selves (Captain America in *Avengers* #56, Goliath in *Avengers Annual* #2, for example), but Astro already met himself as a young boy in *Defenders* #28. That Astro did not mention his prior meeting with himself leads to the conclusion that this is a divergent counterpart to the Vance Astro who met the Defenders, perhaps one who never journeyed back through time before. Even if it were, it seems silly that Astro thought there was any difference made by proximity to his counterpart; maintaining the same vibration rate at the same time would be what causes this disruption of the timestream (i.e., a divergence).

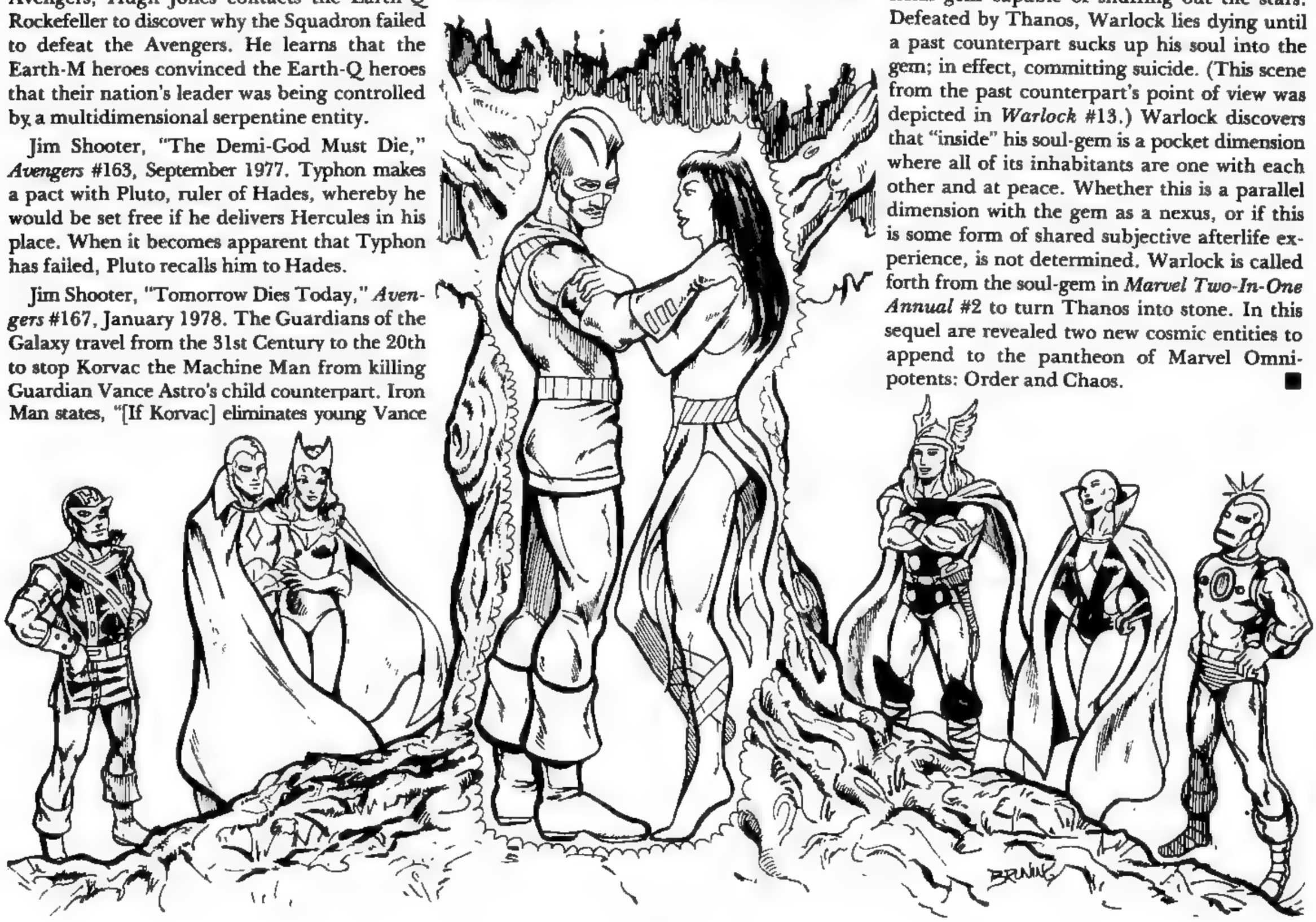
Jim Shooter, "First Blood," *Avengers* #168, February 1978. Korvac tells Starhawk that they will battle "on every plane of existence," referring not to the "planes of Reality" (i.e., parallel dimensions) but rather to the astral as well as physical planes, on which their powers and personae dwell.

Jim Shooter, "Though Hell Should Bar the Way," *Avengers* #170, April 1978. Charlie-27 of the Guardians of the Galaxy saves young Astro from an onrushing truck. It is difficult to determine whether Charlie's entering into Astro's past diverged the Reality the adult Astro remembers, or an alternate one. It must be noted that there also exists an alternate Reality in which Charlie was *not* there to save young Astro, which, incidentally, would suit Korvac's needs—were he Omniversally aware.

Jim Shooter, "Threshold of Oblivion," *Avengers* #173, July 1978. Korvac uses his vast mental ability to peer into the realms of the Watcher, Odin, Zeus, Mephisto, and Eternity to determine if any are aware of his presence.

Jim Shooter, "Captives of the Collector," *Avengers* #174, August 1978. Vanquished by the Avengers, the Collector reveals that he, like his brother, the Grandmaster, are Elders of the Universe, and the reason why he set forth to collect samples of various alien life—including the Avengers—was to preserve them from the impending cosmic calamity caused by Thanos. Following Thanos' demise, he perceived another threat to the universe, but before he can tell the Avengers the name of the threat, he is disintegrated by Korvac.

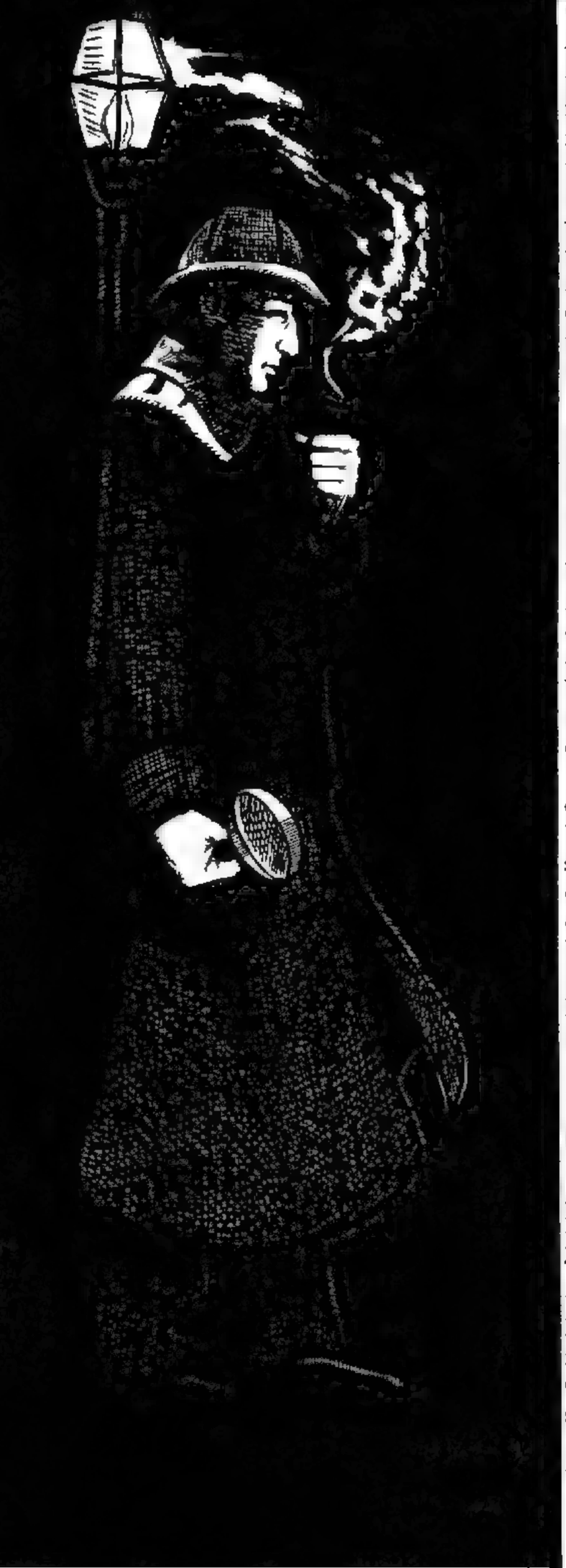
Jim Starlin, "The Final Threat," *Avengers Annual* #7, 1977. Adam Warlock reveals to the Avengers that Thanos has been collecting the six soul-gems in the universe, one of which rests upon Warlock's brow, to create an artificial gem capable of snuffing out the stars. Defeated by Thanos, Warlock lies dying until a past counterpart sucks up his soul into the gem; in effect, committing suicide. (This scene from the past counterpart's point of view was depicted in *Warlock* #13.) Warlock discovers that "inside" his soul-gem is a pocket dimension where all of its inhabitants are one with each other and at peace. Whether this is a parallel dimension with the gem as a nexus, or if this is some form of shared subjective afterlife experience, is not determined. Warlock is called forth from the soul-gem in *Marvel Two-In-One Annual* #2 to turn Thanos into stone. In this sequel are revealed two new cosmic entities to append to the pantheon of Marvel Omnipotents: Order and Chaos. ■



An Inquiry Into Holmesian Reality

"The Case of the Divergent Detective"

by Meloney M. Crawford Art by William Poplaski



It is near midnight. Fog blankets the urban landscape of Victorian London, pierced occasionally by flickering gaslight illumination. A tall, gaunt figure emerges from the dimness, and masterfully hails a passing hansom cab. As horse and driver await instruction, a squarely-built man with an unmistakable military air approaches, his progress hindered by a slight limp. The wiry, commanding figure throws open the door of the cab, urging his companion, "Hurry, Watson! The game is afoot!"

This is perhaps the classic vignette of Sherlock Holmes, master detective, and his aide and biographer, Dr. Watson. Aside from these archetypal scenes, there is little definitive information about the great detective. In recent years, a number of allegedly "undiscovered" or "unpublished" manuscripts of Holmes' adventures have come to light; even the authenticated Canon, written by Dr. Watson and published by his literary agent, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, is replete with incongruities and contradictions.

Holmesian scholars have offered several explanations for such inconsistencies as Watson's traveling wound (was it in his shoulder, or his leg, or some other more delicate part of his anatomy?), Holmes' college, and so forth, ranging from the hypothesis that Watson wrote in some sort of code to protect the illustrious clients of Holmes, to the rather demeaning insinuation that the good Doctor had a poor memory and difficulty reading his own notes. Some of these theories seem quite probable; others can be dismissed out of hand.

One problem that has somehow vexed Holmesian scholars is whether Sherlock Holmes actually existed in our Reality. The location of Holmes' and Watson's rooms on Baker Street has been a particular area of inquiry. Although the address is clearly specified several times in the Canon as 221B Baker Street, there was no such structure in existence in Victorian London. Undaunted, scholars have turned the address inside out and upside down, hoping to find a clue to the number "221." Others have made pilgrimages to Baker Street, pacing out alleys according to Dr. Watson's somewhat vague description in "The Adventure of the Empty House,"[1] hoping to locate the "true" lodgings. All are admirable displays of energy, but rather futile.

The England (indeed, the world) described by Watson in the Canon is striking to the reader with an eye for historical detail. Artistic and musical personalities are authentically represented, while certain political figures (such as the Prime Minister and royal heads of state) are totally incongruous with known histories. Many cases can be pinpointed to the day by a glance at meteorological references, yet fail to double-check through the train schedules. It seems unlikely that Watson would be so precise about some details, yet ignore or distort others; the "code" explanation seems labored. To take a cue from Holmes himself, when one has eliminated all other hypotheses, the one remaining, however unlikely, is correct.

It is therefore reasonable to proceed from the Omniversal premise that the Earth inhabited by Holmes and Watson, like those of other fictional works, is not *our* world, but some divergent Earth in which every Canonical detail is true. Further, the Omniversal Theory quickly leads us to a solution that accounts for all discrepancies in the annals: the various writers are not chronicling the adventures of the same Sherlock Holmes, but rather his divergent counterparts.

Although Holmes kept notes on his cases and may have attempted to chronicle a few adventures himself for his professional use, it is apparent that Dr. Watson held the literary talent in the partnership, producing what Holmes termed "sensationalized" versions of the master detective's cases for publication. The body of cases with which Holmes' followers in this Reality are familiar are editions of Watson's Canon as related by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-

1. *The Return of Sherlock Holmes.*

1930), perhaps the result of Conan Doyle's insights into the prime world in which Holmes lived.[2]

The facts as Conan Doyle presents them are: Sherlock Holmes came from the stock of English squires with "art in his blood" (his grandmother was related to the artist Horace Vernet). He spent several solitary years at a fine British university following a peculiar course of study including chemistry and anatomy, which was to prepare him for his unique career as a consulting detective. It was while at college that he handled his first case, "The *Gloria Scott*."[3]

After completing his studies at the university, he moved to London and prepared to set up shop. It was in Bart's (St. Bartholomew's Hospital) that a young medical student named Stamford assured himself of a place in history by introducing the two men who were to become fast friends, roommates, and partners in the art of detection: Holmes and Watson.

Dr. John H. Watson was a military medical officer serving in Afghanistan, whose tour of duty was cut short when he was wounded by a stray shot which injured his shoulder and legs. Several weeks of lavish living in London had depleted his budget and he was keen at the thought of "going halves" on a fine suite of rooms on Baker Street.

At first the co-tenancy between Holmes and Watson was rather uneventful. In Watson's words, "Holmes was certainly not a difficult man to live with. He was quiet in his ways, and his habits were regular. It was rare for him to be up after ten at night and he had invariably breakfasted and gone out before I rose in the morning."[4] Indeed, the limited contact between the two roommates piqued Watson's curiosity, and he began to speculate as to what manner of fellow Holmes was. Watson completed an inventory of Holmes' talents (and limits) known to him at that time, but abandoned it in despair. Any attempt to reconcile the proficiency at poisons and the violin, etc., seemed impossible.

It was not until "the 4th of March, as I [Watson] have good reason to remember,"[5] that Watson discovered Holmes' dedication to "the art of detection" and his trade as the world's only consulting detective. That same eventful day, Watson joined Holmes as they set forth upon the case which Watson would later dramatically dub *A Study in Scarlet*.

After that initial adventure, Watson became a fixture at Holmes' side in future cases. In "The Adventure of the Speckled Band,"[6] Holmes counseled Helen Stoner, "This is my intimate friend and associate, Dr. Watson, before whom you can speak as freely as before myself." Together they addressed many baffling cases, giving their aid to the often bewildered Scotland Yard forces, including the stalwart Inspectors Lestrade and Gregson, and the "promising" Stanley Hopkins.

The dissolution of the partnership of Holmes and Watson occurred on several occasions, however—most notably during Watson's marriages. It appears that Watson, possessed of an eye for the ladies, was married at least twice. There is little question of his union to Mary Morstan, whom he met and wooed during the events detailed in *The Sign of the Four*. Although marriage formally removed Watson from Baker Street, he continued to rather routinely accompany Holmes on cases, frequently taking leave of his medical practice and his wife. Such as it was, wedded bliss was not fated to be enduring for Watson and Mary Morstan. In "The Adventure of the Empty House"[7] (dated by scholars as 1894), Watson spoke of his "sad bereavement," which we may interpret as a reference to the death of Mary Morstan some years earlier. Watson was to marry again, however. In the later-dated "Adventure of the Blanched Soldier,"[8] Holmes himself took up the pen and wrote, "The good Watson had at that time deserted me for a wife, the only selfish action which I can recall in our association." Although the identity of the second Mrs. Watson was never revealed, it would appear that she was less tolerant of Watson's association with Holmes than was Mary Morstan. This view is supported by the slight bitterness of the great detective's words on the subject.

Many scholars posit yet another marriage of Watson's, prior to Mary Morstan, perhaps to an American. This offers a persuasive argument for many of Watson's chronological inconsistencies; basically, that Watson juggled dates so as to spare Mary Morstan from seeing constant reminders in print of his earlier marriage. This is an interesting speculation, but as it is never expressly mentioned in the Canon, it is not conclusive.

While in "The Adventure of the Second Stain,"[9] Holmes conceded to Watson that "the fair sex is your department," Holmes was exceedingly courteous and gentle to women throughout the Canon. Violently opposed to marriage ("I should never marry, lest I bias my judgment"[10]), on at least one occasion it is possible that Holmes became sentimentally (if not romantically) involved.

"To Sherlock Holmes she is always *the* woman. I have seldom heard him mention her under any other name. In his eyes she eclipses and predominates the whole of her sex." So Watson described the vivacious, talented and brilliant Irene Adler at the beginning of "A Scandal in Bohemia."[11] In that case, Adler outwitted Holmes in his search for the incriminating photograph of the "King of Bohemia," but earned herself a permanent place in Holmes' heart. He claimed her portrait as his reward and conferred upon her the "honourable title" of "*the* woman."

The detective may have been gifted with a great heart and mind, but he was indeed solitary by nature. Watson presumed him to be "an orphan with no living relatives," and was greatly surprised on the summer evening (in "The Greek Interpreter"[12]) that Holmes began to speak of his brother Mycroft. As Watson was to discover, Holmes' elder sibling possessed an even greater facility for observation and deduction, yet refrained from detective work due to a complete lack of energy and ambition. The corpulent Mycroft maintained a steady routine between his rooms in Pall Mall, his vital position of record-keeping for the British government, and the privacy-conscious Diogenes Club, and only the most extraordinary circumstances could cause him to sway from his customary rounds. One such uncharacteristic action was his appearance as a coachman when Sherlock prepared for his final meeting with Professor James Moriarty.

It was Moriarty who was responsible for what many believed to be the death of Sherlock Holmes. "The Napoleon of Crime," as Holmes dubbed him, was a degenerate genius with a brilliant academic career in the field of abstract mathematics. Retiring from his university position at an early age, he went on to become the great mastermind of all crime in London, and the arch-enemy of Sherlock Holmes.

In "The Final Problem,"[13] Watson described the conclusive showdown between Moriarty and Holmes, ending in a fatal plunge into the Falls of Reichenbach, high in the Swiss Alps. Moriarty's criminal exploits were halted, but Watson had lost

2. D. Mullaney, "The Imagination Fallacy," *Omniverse* #1, 1977.
3. *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes.*
4. *A Study in Scarlet.*
5. *Ibid.*
6. *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes.*
7. *The Return of Sherlock Holmes.*
8. *The Case Book of Sherlock Holmes.*
9. *Return.*
10. *The Sign of the Four.*
11. *Adventures.*
12. *Memoirs.*
13. *Ibid.*

"the best and wisest man" whom he had ever known.

For three years Watson and the world at large thought Sherlock Holmes dead. It was in the spring of 1894 that Watson was visited in his offices by a wizened bookseller he had accidentally knocked down in the street. Watson turned, and the old man revealed himself to be Sherlock Holmes.

He explained to Watson how Moriarty perished in the chasm at Reichenbach, and how he was forced to feign death to prevent remaining members of the Moriarty gang from seeking revenge. During the three years of the Great Hiatus (as it is called by Holmesian scholars), Holmes traveled worldwide under the name of Sigerson, visiting Tibet, the Middle East, and France. Only Mycroft Holmes knew of his brother's continued existence.

Reunited, Holmes and Watson tackled a series of problems, ranging from "The Adventure of the Empty House,"[14] where the last of the Moriarty gang was apprehended, to "The Adventure of the Illustrious Client,"[15] which Watson notes as "in some ways, the supreme moment of my friend's career."

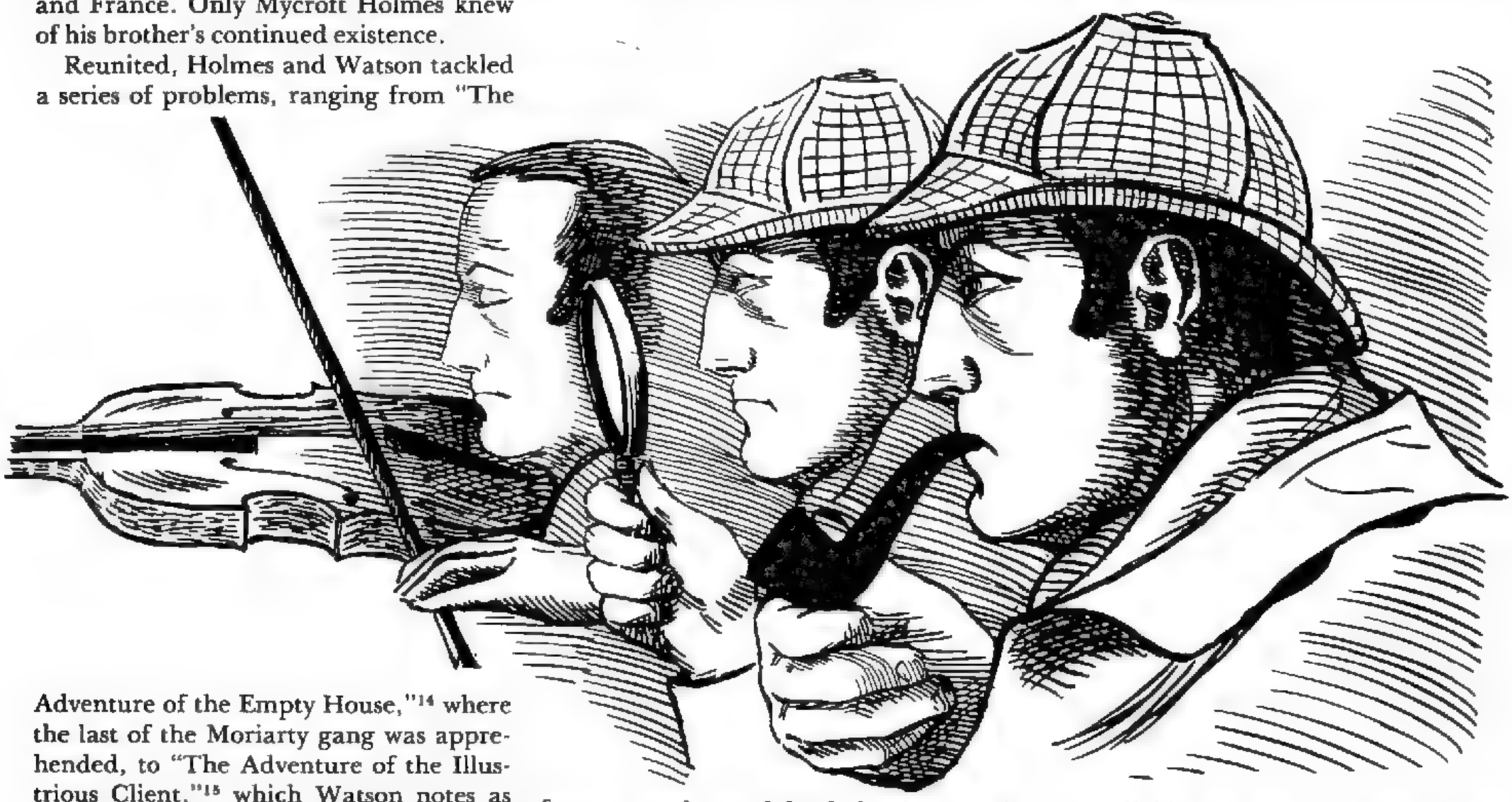
By 1903, as we have already noted, Watson remarried, and his change of circumstances seemed to inhibit his friendship with Holmes. Their adventures were relatively few, and Holmes subsequently retired to "that little farm of my dreams" on the South Downs.

According to the Canon, the master detective and his "Boswell" were to collaborate one last time. In August 1914, under the shadow of World War I, Holmes and Watson foiled the espionage plans of the German Von Bork, in the story appropriately entitled "His Last Bow."

14. *Return.*
15. *Case Book.*

Although "His Last Bow" was the final Holmes adventure penned by Watson and published by Conan Doyle, other "previously unpublished" tales of the master detective purport to be the genuine article, often relating cases that Watson obliquely mentioned in the past. It is nearly impossible to gauge conclusively the authenticity of each work that comes to light, but a cursory examination of some of these tales reveals information that is at odds with that of the Canon.

One volume of interest is *The Exploits of Sherlock Holmes*, by John Dickson Carr and Adrian Conan Doyle, the son of Watson's "literary agent." The retitled adventures in *Exploits* stem from the almost coy references Watson made in earlier stories. ("The Camberwell Poisoning Case," "the famous card scandal of the Nonpareil Club," the case of "Wilson, the notorious canary-trainer," among others.) The tone and detail of these cases seem to be Watson's own. Here we have the enduring friendship of Holmes and Watson (needled occasionally by Holmes' fits of temperamental genius); here also are the decorative details of the Baker Street rooms: cigars in the coal scuttle, gasogene, and target practice in the sitting room. Even the faithful landlady Mrs. Hudson and the plodding Inspector Lestrade are mentioned. The only disturbing aspect is a seeming incongruity between Watson's original references and the content of the stories themselves. For example, "The Adventure of the Seven Clocks" included in the *Exploits* collection supposedly pertains to Watson's comment in "A Scandal in Bohemia": "From time to time I heard of some vague account of his [Holmes'] doings: of his summons to Odessa in the case of the Trepoff murder." As related, the tale concerned the efforts of Holmes to prevent the murder of young Grand Duke Alexei at the hands of Trepoff, a Nihilist agent. In retrospect, a clear-cut case to describe—it would seem that Watson refers to Trepoff as the murdered party, rather than the murderer. A flaw of this caliber is difficult to overlook, and puzzling to explain. Did the younger Doyle take liberties with Watson's notes? Must we fall back on the "code" or "sensitive political figure" theories? As Holmes himself would note, an accurate conclusion cannot be formed without the proper data. Until such data are available, we must not conclude that the *Exploits* collection describes the same Holmes as does the Canon.



One scrap of information which has titillated the imagination of Holmes' followers is his comment to Watson in "The Adventure of the Sussex Vampire,"[16] referring to the ship *Matilda Briggs* and the giant rat of Sumatra, "a story for which the world is not yet prepared..." A version of the tale was recently published by Richard L. Boyer. Readers are spared the details of how Boyer came into possession of the manuscript, be it auction, attic cleaning, or maiden aunt, but are treated to a gripping tale. Its claim to authenticity seems valid; the style is Watson's at his most dramatic, with all the vital elements.

16. *Ibid.*

We see the appropriate camaraderie between Holmes and Watson, the master detective as master of fisticuffs, Lestrade and the official forces nearly bungling the case, and Holmes leaving Watson as his solitary "agent," much as he did when dealing with that other monstrous beast, the Hound of the Baskervilles.

Some "untold tales" deviate from the Canon in their depiction of Holmes and/or his world so severely that they cannot possibly be accepted into the primary Holmes mythos. One such case is *Sherlock Holmes' War of the Worlds* (by Manly W. Wellman and Wade Wellman), which features Holmes teaming with Professor George Edward Challenger (of Doyle's *The Lost World*) against a Martian menace. Accepting for the moment that it was not improbable for Challenger and Holmes to meet,[17] it becomes clear that this is not the Holmes and Watson we are familiar with. Although the story is dated *circa* 1902, at the time of Watson's (second?) marriage and relative estrangement from Holmes, the two conduct themselves in a manner that hardly befits two fast friends. Watson is depicted as a plodding, prudish fool—the continual butt of Holmes' scorn. Holmes, on the other hand, is hardly the efficient reasoning machine. Busy romancing landlady Martha Hudson, Holmes spends a good deal of time away from the immediate problem of the Martian invasion in order to escort the seductive Martha to safety. The most likely explanation for this abundance of uncharacteristic behavior and "unrealistic" portrayals is that this tale took place on an alternate Earth from that of the Canon.

If one accepts a world where Holmes battled alien creatures, then perhaps the idea of Holmes and Watson traveling to Africa and battling the German Von Bork for a final encounter (after "His Last Bow") does not seem outlandish. However, *The Adventures of the Peerless Peer*, edited by Philip Jose Farmer, strains all credibility. It is not the concept of Holmes and Watson (both in their sixties) doing one more caper for Mother England, nor their encounter with the renegade Lord Greystoke (a. k. a. Tarzan, Lord of the Jungle) that merits skepticism, but the portrayal of the characters. Holmes and Watson are perhaps two of the most famous models of British deportment and propriety; it seems totally out of character for either one to act any less than a gentleman, or to conduct himself in the ludicrous manner alleged in this tale. It is fair to say that Watson did not indulge in profanity; nor was Holmes prone to violent airsickness and terror, or to prancing about naked smeared with mud. It may be that "editor" Farmer fabricated this story in order to give some credence to his bizarre genealogical theories. His proposals that Holmes is a cousin of the American adventurer Doc Savage, and that Savage, in turn, is distantly related to Greystoke, are without any factual authentication in the Canon or in the other sources from which Farmer draws.[18]

We have already concluded that Holmes' adventures did not take place on "our" Earth, yet that view is not unanimously shared by Holmesian scholars. In his biography *Sherlock Holmes of Baker Street*, Sir William Baring-Gould notes Holmes' relationship with a number of figures from our history, including Lewis Carroll and Karl Marx. He also posits a second meeting between Holmes and Irene Adler (during the period of the Great Hiatus) which resulted not only in romance, but in a son. These are intriguing proposals, but mere speculation without further substantiations. Unfortunately, Baring-Gould never saw fit to reveal his sources.

Still another Holmes adventure which seems highly uncanonical is *The Seven Per-Cent Solution*, edited by Nicholas Meyer. Purporting to be the "true" story of Holmes' clash with Moriarty, it depicts Holmes seriously addicted to cocaine acting out a paranoid delusion in which he views his harmless former mathematics tutor as a master criminal. Concerned for the health and sanity of his friend, Watson takes him to Vienna where he is treated and cured by Sigmund Freud, father of psychoanalysis. Although Watson's devotion throughout the tale is quite touching, the portrayal of Holmes as a junkie is near-libelous. As noted in the Canon, Holmes took cocaine on occasion when boredom overcame him in between challenging cases.[19] However, he most surely held his own mental faculties and capability for ordered thought in too high a regard to allow himself to become addicted, and at Watson's urgings, he eventually stopped the destructive habit. As for Moriarty, the infamous "Napoleon of Crime," being an innocuous mathematics teacher, it is clear from Holmes' remarks in "The Final Problem" that Moriarty's power stemmed from his ability to operate unknown, just within the pale of the law. It may be that the manuscript obtained by Meyer was a clever forgery, written as a "cover" for Moriarty's activities (and those of his organization) and part of a plan to discredit Holmes. Taken as true, *The Seven Per-Cent Solution* does not depict the same Sherlock Holmes as in the Canon.

Holmes and Watson have also appeared, in one form or another, within the pages of comics. Both DC and Marvel have published editions of tales from the Canon,[20] yet it seems clear that these are mere retellings, not adventures that originated in either the DC or Marvel multiverses. However, there is at least one original tale that posits a Holmes-like character existing on present-day Earth-One.[21] Even if the character were stated by name to be Sherlock Holmes (which he was not), there is no way to determine if the man were some younger counterpart to the Holmes of the Canon, or simply a man who patterned his life after a famous fictional detective. Stories set in the Marvel multiverse also provide circumstantial evidence of the existence of a Holmes counterpart on at least one of its worlds. After his mental collapse, Depression-era stock broker Hodiah Twist modeled his life after Holmes, and indeed believed he *was* the master detective.[22] Whether Twist's knowledge of Holmes derived from Conan Doyle's books or documented accounts of an actual personage is not yet known. In more recent times, British agent Clive Reston frequently made oblique references to his "grand-uncle," who also seems to be a Holmes-like character.[23] Perhaps Reston's relative is Hodiah Twist. As Holmes said, "The grand thing is to be able to reason backward."[24]

As we have seen, there are many possible turns in the Holmesian tradition. We have opened just a few doors in a maze of alternate paths purporting to be but one. We may be assured, however, that Holmes and Watson remain immortal...not only in our memories, but in the incalculable mirror-images in the labyrinth. ■

17. The eminent Holmesian scholar Sir William Baring-Gould suggests that Holmes and Challenger are distantly related. See *Sherlock Holmes of Baker Street*.

18. Farmer presents these unsubstantiated genealogies in *Tarzan Alive* and *Doc Savage: His Apocalyptic Life*. One would assume that Holmes' lineage would not vary from Reality to Reality, that a divergence in his ancestors' may not even result in his conception.

19. The most memorable depiction of this scene occurred at the start of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.

20. *Sherlock Holmes* #1, September-October 1975, DC Comics, and *Marvel Preview* #5, 6, April-Spring 1976, Marvel Comics.

21. Bob Haney, "Hell Is For Heroes," *The Brave and the Bold Special*, 1978.

22. Hodiah Twist has appeared in *Vampire Tales* #2, *Amazing Adventures* #32, and *Marvel Preview* #16.

23. *Master of Kung Fu* #31, p. 11, for example.

24. *A Study in Scarlet*.

CASE STUDIES: COMICS

by KIM THOMPSON and JOHN NIELSEN

A: Enhances continuity or illuminates some new facet of reality.
B: Despite some minor oversights, solid in its depiction of reality.
C: Major problems in its depiction of reality, but still explainable.
D: Detrimental to the reader's understanding of reality.

Flash #260, "The 1000 Year Old Root," by Cary Bates, April 1978, DC.

Eric Russell, 30th Century father of the Flash's wife, Iris Allen, discovers during his studies of the 20th Century that one of his ancestors, Phillip Russell, died in the morning, became a super-villain in the afternoon, and married in the night of the same day. Visiting the 20th Century, Eric Russell investigates the matter and learns that his ancestor developed a Jekyll/Hyde personality from a seemingly fatal accident, impelling him to take on the identity of the Viper. After a battle with the Flash, Phillip Russell is cured and delivered to his wedding, ensuring that Eric Russell's future will stem from Flash's present.

This story is particularly noteworthy because Flash debunks the notion that there is any danger in "changing history." Russell: "Must I outline the dangers of altering the course of history?" Flash: "You've got it wrong, Eric. We've already become a part of Phillip Russell's destiny." Iris' father himself engages in a surprisingly lucid reflection: "We could unwittingly set off a chain reaction of unnatural events that might drastically alter the 30th Century as we know it. Our future would still exist—in another dimension. But we couldn't return to it." This statement is a breath of fresh air contrasted to the dozens of stale stories in which one Reality is said to be "destroyed," just because an alternate has come into being. Although words like "unnatural," "might," and "in another dimension" aren't quite as precise as they could be, the general idea acknowledging multiple futures springing from a single present is reinforced.

Reality Rating: A.

DC Special #11, *Flash Spectacular*, "Beyond the Super-Speed Barrier," by Cary Bates, 1978, DC.

Gorilla Grodd is executed by his peers by having his atoms dispatched to a "remote dimensional plane" that can only be "penetrated" (reached?) by super-speed. From this plane, Grodd manipulates Flash, Kid Flash, and Flash-2 to run at the precise speed necessary to accrue his scattered atoms. Grodd then demonstrates a mastery over his molecular structure rivalling the Flash's own, by integrating his gathered molecules into his original form. In a battle to defeat him, the Flashes merge their atoms to "triple their speed," which amounts to the three occupying the same space. (Flash and Kid Flash did this before in *Flash* #220.) Although unelaborated on, to occupy the same space at least two of the three Flashes had to vibrate at unactualized rates—those not corresponding to any existing Reality. That this should have in any way increased their collective speed seems absurd.

Reality Rating: C.

DC Special #9, *Wonder Woman Spectacular*, "The Cosmic Quest for the Disc of Mars," by Jack Harris, 1978, DC.

A mystic amulet worn by an American called the Bombardier is said to be magically prolonging World War II, while conferring on its bearer invulnerability and super-powers. The Earthly conflict is observed by gods of Greek and Norse mythology (and reputedly others) from "a place called by many names—Valhalla...Heaven ...Asgard...Olympus." This attempt to synthesize all mythologies into one is too literal and heavy-handed to be even superficially credible. Past tales involving DC's gods have given us no reason to assume that they all dwelled in a single dimensional place, instead of unique ones. While it is not impossible that various pantheons have convened at times of cosmic significance, it seems a distortion to assert that they are all of homogeneous origin.

Reality Rating: C.

Showcase #100, "There Shall Come a Gathering," by Paul Kupperberg and Paul Levitz, May 1978, DC.

A shimmering curtain of alien intelligence has placed the Earth into a time stasis field in order to move it out of orbit for use as a cannonball against the alien's enemies. The time stasis field begins to randomly pluck beings out of Earth's past (Anthro, Bat Lash) and future (Space Ranger, Tommy Tomorrow), depositing them at the time of the planetary abduction. While Flash, Green Lantern, Atom, Space Ranger, and Adam Strange (inexplicably coming all the way from Rann for the occasion) track down the Earthnappers, the rest of the heroes help the displaced people of Earth. The hijacked planet is said to be accelerating at light speed, although there is no mention of what power source has the energy to move such a mass at that speed in so short a time. In the end, the always-popular *deus ex machina* of the heroes combining their wills to set things right (here, restoring the Earth to its proper velocity and space instantaneously) is brought into play. The compounded asininities of this story's premises and developments plead fervently for its dismissal as a hallucination.

Reality Rating: D.

Wonder Woman #243, "The Five-Sided Square," by Jack Harris, May 1978, DC.

The Angle Man's Angler device (which has temporal/dimensional/teleportational properties over which he has minimal control) teleports him from Earth-One 1978 to Earth-Two 1945. There the device fetches the Earth-One Wonder Woman of 1978, too. Despite contrived implications that she was affected because she was a dimensional counterpart to the Wonder Woman of Earth-Two (as if there are but two!), the more probable reason WW was scuttled back through time is that she was standing near the Angler when it disappeared from JLA Headquarters and was swept up in its path. Being Apokolipsian, the Angler probably contains the X-Element that powers the Boom Tube and Matter Threshold. That the Angler traveled into the past of a different Reality than the one it started from is an indication that it operates with a sizable factor of Sideways Slippage. Not only does the Angle Man have but the vaguest of notions how the Angler works, so does the author, to judge by the story's lapses in explanation.

Reality Rating: C.

World's Finest #250, "The Reality War," by Gerry Conway, April-May 1978, DC.

In an effort to get Black Canary back to Earth-Two, Green Arrow activates the JLA's TransmatterCube (damaged in *Superman Family* #186, 187). This somehow causes all of the superheroes of Earth-One to vanish, and sends the Arrow and the Canary on a collision course with Wonder Woman's robot-plane on Earth-Two 1942. This, in turn, sends the three of them to Earth-One of the same year. Here Professor Mark Ronson, who is working on a time machine (called a Chronal Transponder), is shot by American gangsters in the service of German agents. Thinking that his machine will put him into a state of "time stasis," he has Wonder Woman activate it. Instead, it transforms him into the Ravager of Time, a humanoid light-creature who bounces back between 1942 and 1978 on Earth-One, somehow causing monuments and people to move with him. Superman and Batman, the only Earth heroes who weren't caught in this "time-hinge" caused by the Ravager, appear in 1942 but do not recognize Green Arrow or Black Canary. Finally, the Chronal Transponder explodes, and Superman says, "The Ravager's energies are shattering the whole space/time continuum. In seconds, nothing will be left but might-have-beens." This is, of course, misleading: such an event couldn't affect the whole continuum (i.e., Omniverse), probably not even the whole DC Multiverse, and is probably just a localized time distortion somewhere in the vicinity of Earth-One and Earth-Two. In the end, no one remembers what happened except GA and BC, who inadvertently precipitated the whole thing.

"The Reality War" is replete with the most facile and fallacious time travel tricks, including selective disappearances, selective memory loss, and vacillating reality, as well as a disturbing tendency to assume that once time is breached, anything goes. This story will stand for years to come as a glittering textbook example of every confusing cliche to be avoided in time travel stories.

Reality Rating: D.

Superboy and the Legion of Super-Heroes #233, "The Infinite Man Who Conquered the Legion," by Paul Levitz, November 1977, DC.

During an experiment probing the "circular nature of time," a man named Rugarth is thrown into a closed loop of eternity and emerges from it insane but nearly omnipotent. The Infinite Man battles the Legion on several occasions until finally they use the same machine to trap him within the infinite time-circle.

The nature of time and eternity is one of the basic questions of the Omniversal Theory, and this story seems to wish to prove that it is circular. This notion of a closed loop probably originated when someone tried to imagine eternity—time without beginning or end—and used as an analogy a circle which also has no beginning or end. The philosophical implication of time travel as a circle is that all events are predetermined; with subsequent circuits, events would occur in precisely the same way.

In an Omniverse of a nigh-infinite number of events in diverging Realities, the notion of predestination seems absurd.

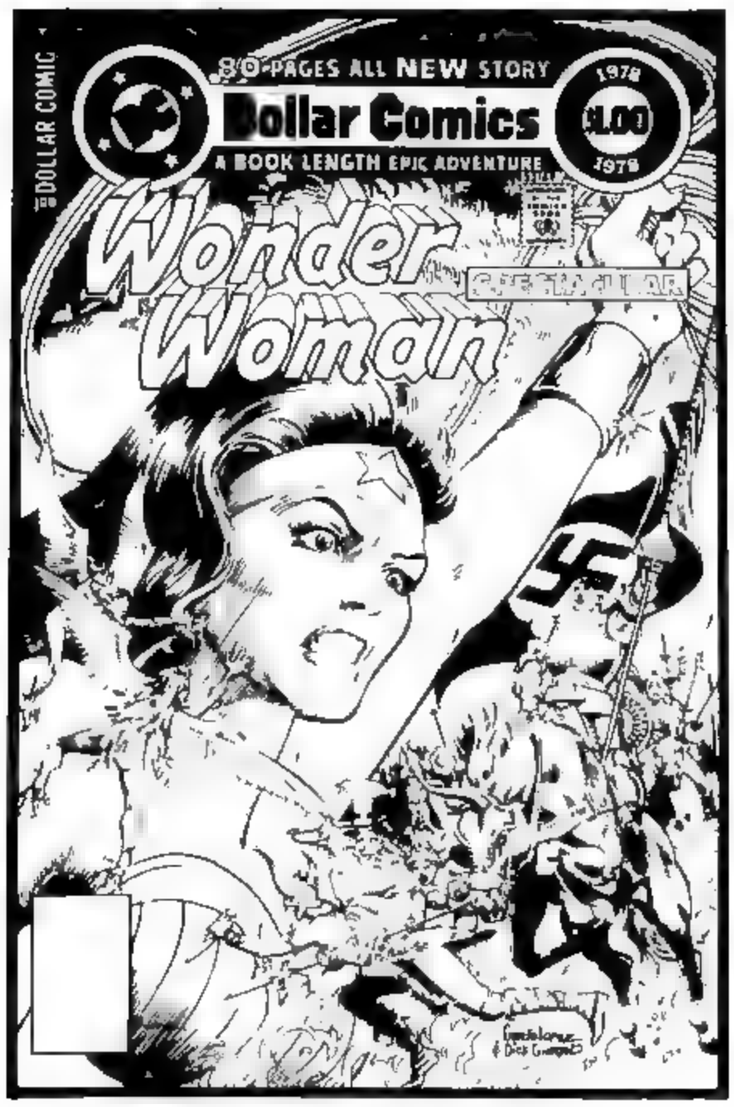
Does "The Infinite Man Who Conquered the Legion" throw a monkey wrench into the mechanism of the Omniverse by proving that time is a circle? Not really, since Rugarth's circuitous trip can also be explained as a closed loop independent of the whole of a time, a minor rupture in the fabric of time perhaps caused by his very means of travel. In other words, during Rugarth's journey through Limbo, he reaches a point at which he is snapped back to an earlier point, so it is his journey, not time itself, that is a circle.

For an entity who has mastered time, the Infinite Man falls prey to a shortcoming that has destroyed the credibility of virtually every self-proclaimed time master except Kang. That is, since a time traveler has the capability of returning to any instant he chooses, why give the Legionnaires days to plan between his second and third assaults, rather than attacking them again and again within seconds of each other? He could spend years in preparation for his attacks and still launch them consecutively while his foes are recovering from his last.

While the premise of S/LSH #233 was promising, its execution was dismally average.

Reality Rating: C.

All New Collector's Edition #C-58, *Superman vs. Shazam*, "When Earths Collide," by Gerry Conway, 1978, DC.



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A Martian scientist named Karmang concocts a scheme to liberate his race from the phantom-like state he accidentally banished them to eons ago. His plan is the oft-attempted ploy of drawing two parallel Earths (in this case, Earth-One and Earth-S) together, causing them to annihilate each other. Towards this end, he enlists the aid of Black Adam and the Quarmmer to distract the only champions of the worlds who might become aware of his scheme, Superman and Captain Marvel, by engineering a fight between them. Meanwhile, Supergirl and Mary Marvel learn of the mad Martian's scheme, battle him, and cause him to be sucked into the same "limbo" that the rest of his race is in.

As with all of the other times when the "collision of parallel Earths" trick has been attempted (JLA #46, 47 and #82, 83, for example), "When Earths Collide" still does not explain the phenomenon for what it is (the simultaneous attunement of two Realities to the same vibration rate, a theoretical improbability) but depicts it as a collision of two planetary objects separated in space.

Reality Rating: C.

All New Collector's Edition #C-55, *Superboy and the Legion of Super-Heroes*, "The Millenium Massacre," by Paul Levitz, 1978, DC.

Superboy journeys to the 30th Century for the wedding of Saturn Girl and Lightning Lad, only to discover that the Earth is heavily militarized and at war with several neighboring planets. He tries to convince the Legionnaires that something is dreadfully amiss, but they predictably tell him that Earth has always been like this. Superboy proposes that they make an expedition to 1978 to check out his hunch that someone has been tampering with the timestream, but most of the others would rather rescue the newlyweds from a trap on the moon instead. The LSH breaks into teams to do both, apparently unaware that the past can wait for whenever they choose to journey to it. Eventually, it is discovered that the Time Trapper is behind it all: by causing a Divergent Factor in 1978 (the United Nations disbanding), he has created the alternate future Superboy arrived in. Following the Trapper to "the end of time" (a euphemism for the end of the Earth), the Legion learns that he is a renegade Controller (a race of powerful other-dimensional beings), and he intends to rule "all dimensions" (Omniversally silly) by "using the energy created by destroying time in your puny galaxy." To such ends, he employs the Miracle Machine, a gift from the Controllers that actualizes thought. He tries to use it to "think" the Legion dead, but the super-youths use their "combined willpowers" (how original!) to beat the Trapper's will, not to mention his speed of thought. Vanquishing the Time Trapper in his own dimension, they witness "history [beginning to] right itself, returning to its natural path as easily as an undammed stream."

"The Millenium Massacre" is particularly lamentable in view of the excellence of the Time Trapper's previous appearance in S/LSH #223. The most basic fallacy is the notion that creating a new Reality Line eliminates the pre-existing one. This fallacy is compounded by the vacillating reality scenario, where everything returns to normal at the story's end. Unlike Cary Bates in *Flash* #260 reviewed above, most authors seem to have difficulty grasping these simple facts of divergence: that they are permanent, they do not affect pre-existing Realities, and that attempts to undo new Realities only create *more* new Realities. It is also worth noting that the story advances a value judgment on the "rightness" of an "original" Reality, and the "wrongness" of its divergents, as if in a near-infinite number of Realities, only some are natural.

Other aspects of the story range from nebulous to erroneous. Since the Legionnaires of this alternate Reality were familiar with *a* Superboy (one who has frequented this U.N.-deprived Reality and is a member of the LSH), one wonders why he did not attend the wedding. (Perhaps his path got crossed with the other Superboy's and he arrived in the non-militaristic 30th Century wondering how *it* got that way.)

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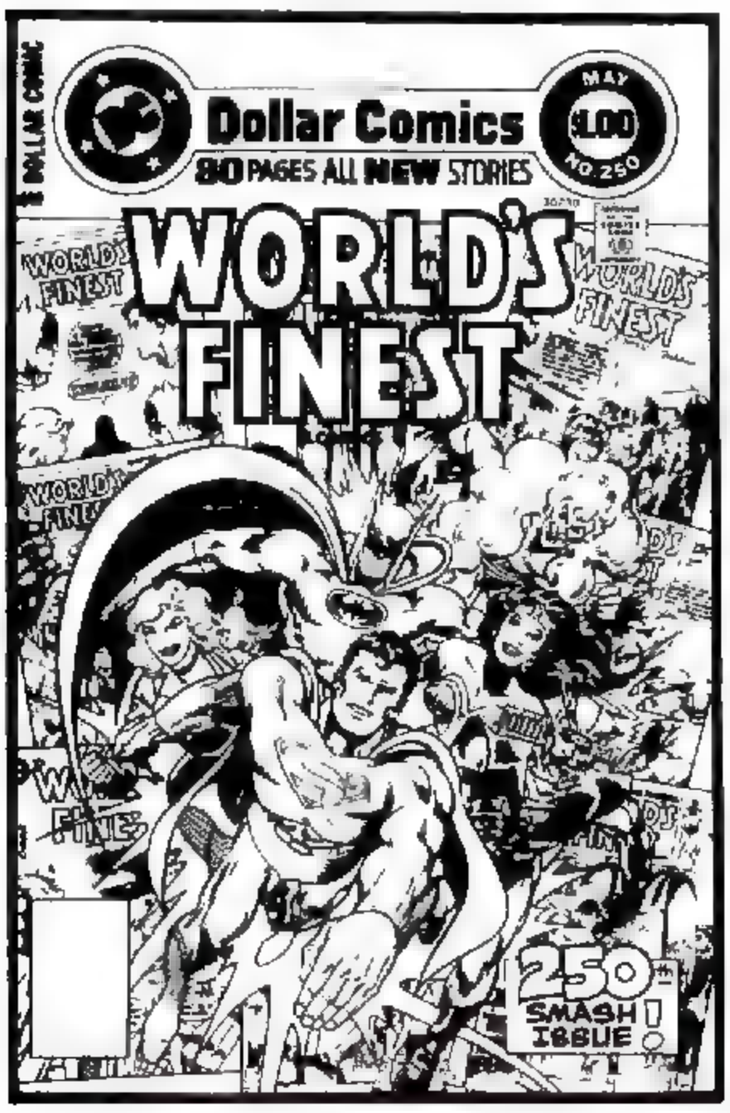
It is also highly questionable that a millenium's worth of differences since the disbanding of the U.N. in 1978 did not produce any more significant differences in the line-up of the Legion; it was identical to that of the "original" Legion. One might have expected that with an interplanetary war going on, xenophobia would have resulted in a considerably less interplanetary membership. A third gaping fallacy is Brainiac-5's statement to Superboy as they are about to disembark from their timesphere in 1978, "Time does not permit one individual to be in two places at the same time -- and this is Superman's era." This statement has been disproved by more meeting-of-temporal-counterparts stories than can be enumerated, as well as by Omniversal logic.

Since "The Millenium Massacre" is permeated with more discrepancies, loopholes in logic, and fallacies than are worth the effort of explaining, we will save its justification to the terminally trite.

Reality Rating: D.

Secret Society of Super-Villains #13, 14, "One Earth Too Many," "Crisis On Earth-Three (Reprise)," by Gerry Conway, March-May 1978, DC.

The Earth-Two Wizard employs the Trans-Spatial Transponder built by S.T.A.R. labs in an effort to return to his native dimension. Along the way, he and his Secret Society get caught in the "vibrational border lands" (dimensions with fractional vibration rates), probably because of the machine's crudity at vibrational attunement. Somehow, their passage frees three of the five members of the



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Crime Syndicate of Earth-Three who have supposedly been imprisoned there since JLA #30. (It is never explained why Owlman and Ultra Man were not also released.) Earth-One hero Captain Comet, pursuing the Secret Society, encounters the Syndicators on Earth-Three and meets a counterpart to Lois Lane. Comet uses Power Ring's magic power battery to travel to Earth-Two after having defeated the Earth-Three villains.

Despite vagaries here and there, this story contains no real continuity problems.

Reality Rating: B.

DC Comics Presents #1, 2, "Chase to the End of Time," "Race to the End of Time," by Martin Pasko, July-August, September-October 1978, DC.

An alien vibrational ray striking a small town leads Superman and Flash to being captured by the leaders of the alien Volkir and Zelkot, two races in the midst of millenia-old civil war. The aliens reveal that one-celled waste products from their living starships began life on Earth and Krypton eons ago. In order to prevent the aliens from destroying the Earth, Flash agrees to help the Zelkot named Iylar through the "Cosmic Curtain" so he can prevent the civil war between the two races. Flash and Superman are told that "time is a circle—if one moves forward in time far enough, he will reach the end of time...what we call the Cosmic Curtain—the ultimate time barrier."

After Flash departs, Superman is told by the Volkir that if Flash helps prevent the civil war, then their people will not have colonized Krypton and "suppressed the internal forces that would have destroyed your native world eons before Krypton eventually did explode." Superman concludes, "[If] Krypton explodes prematurely...there will never be a Superman! I will have ceased to exist!" and sets out to stop the Flash despite the danger to Earth.

Flash, however, is temporarily waylaid by Professor Zoom, who intercepts him at the interval he passes through the 25th Century. Vanquishing him with the help of Superman, Flash learns why the Man of Steel is opposing him, then falls victim to a "time-mine" which hurls him into the 27th Century. Superman pauses in the 27th Century to repair a dimensional rift by literally stitching it up, then goes forward in time only to find himself stuck in the 30th Century. Landing, he postulates that he is trapped there because his temporal counterpart, Superboy, is also in that era. Superman reasons, "The signal transmitted across time by the alien communicator... disturbed the space/time continuum—distorting the natural laws—allowing me to co-exist with a version of myself from an earlier time of my life!" Superman and Superboy decide to deliberately collide with one another in hopes that the force will hurl them back to their prospective time eras. With Superboy back in the 1950s, Superman has no problem getting through the 30th Century, and catches up with the Flash.

Soon, at the end of time, the heroes see Iylar about to streak through the rent in the Cosmic Curtain, a tear that will supposedly permit only one being through it. By vibrating, they both make it through after him, defeat him, and carry him forward through time from Creation. Arriving instants after they left, they defeat the aliens at super-speed, and toss their ships across the galaxy.

That, as succinctly as possible, is the plot of this 50 page epic. An examination of the story's lapses in logic and continuity yields that a significant fallacy occurs once every five pages. Let us enumerate:

1) Iylar's prevention of the civil war will not prevent Superman from existing or change any pre-existing Reality in any way. All it will do is diverge a new Reality. That Superman again fell for this lame excuse to precipitate time travel stories is astounding.

2) The aliens' theory that time travel is a circle is all the more questionable considering that they do not have the knowledge to even travel backwards in time, a rather rudimentary ability. Where did they derive this theory if the Cosmic Curtain permits them but a single passage, and no one has yet been through it to see if they emerge at the dawn of time? If the rent permits but one being to ever pass through it, how did the Infinite Man (S/LSH #233) and others make the circuit?

3) Assuming that the Cosmic Curtain is an actual phenomenon, it may be no more than a closed loop in the actual timestream in relation to the Earth-One Multiverse which catapults beings who reach a certain era back to time's beginning. If we give the aliens' chart of time any credence, it is a relatively small loop of no more than 15 millenia. (Further debunking of the Time-Circle Theory is given in the review of S/LSH #233 elsewhere in this column.)

4) Instead of traveling through time into the future, why didn't Flash travel seconds into the past and instead push the alien away from the lever that would disintegrate the Earth? In effect, that's what Flash does after taking the circuit through time. Flash has doubled back on himself before (*Flash* #161).

5) That Professor Zoom was able to trip the Flash seems absurd. Traveling through the transtemporal medium of Limbo, one does not pass through real-time along the way for even a nanosecond; one is totally outside the timestream for the duration. It is possible that Flash was timeskimming, i.e., passing into real-time at selected intervals like a skipping stone, but this was neither mentioned nor necessary given the nature of Flash's quest. It is also possible that Zoom intercepted the Flash in Limbo and wrested him back to his era, but this was not mentioned either.

6) Superman's closing of an artificial nexus caused by a "time-mine" by stitching

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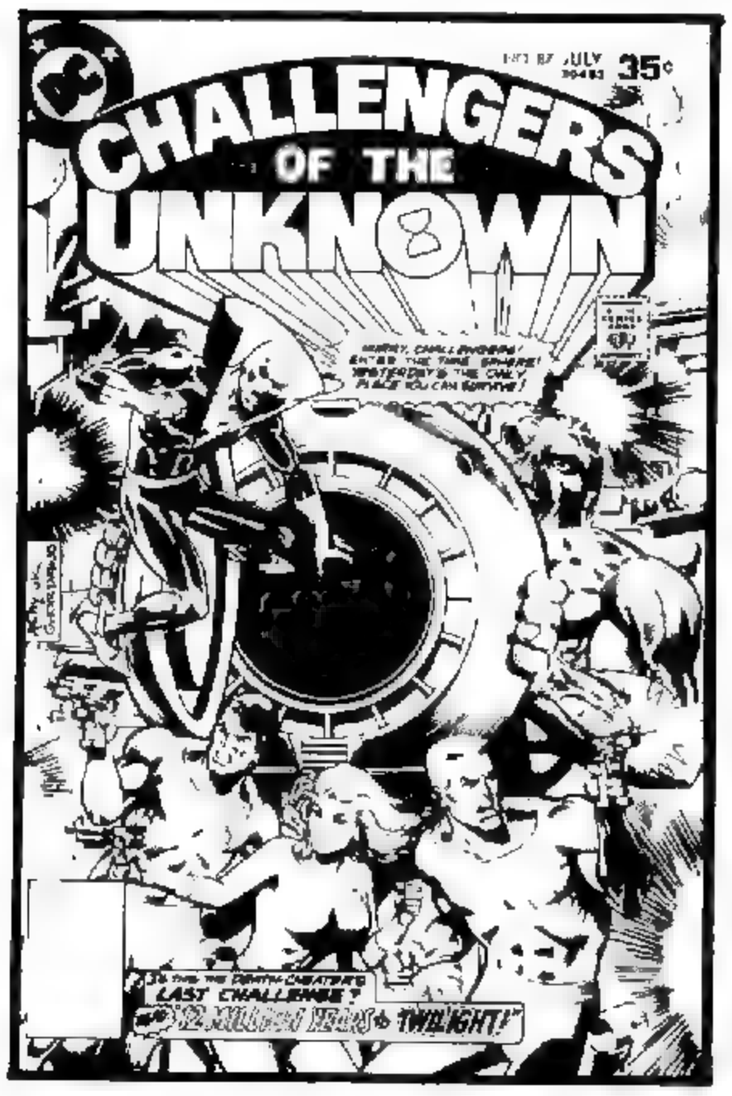
up a hole in the wall is silly.

7) Superman becoming stuck in the 30th Century as he passes it (he, too, must have been timeskimming to be so affected) opens a can of worms' worth of problems. First, Superman's assumption that it is the communicator that is distorting natural laws to allow him to co-exist with himself ignores the fact that Superman and Superboy have co existed at the same interval on the same Reality Line before, and that there is no natural law which prevents such an irregularity. Brainiac-5 should have been able to tell them that.

8) It is preposterously convenient that a head-on collision between the counterparts would hurl them back to the respective instants they traveled from. This invocation of the "irresistible force meets an immovable object" chestnut has nothing to do with the mechanics of time travel as Superman has been known to employ them.



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9) The fact that Superman did not remember the precise situation of meeting Superboy like this is an indication that the Superboy he met is not the temporal counterpart who grew up to be him, but rather a divergent one. (The dream that Superman mentions is not a memory of this occurrence.) This is left unmentioned.

10) Superman predicts no problem passing through the 30th Century once Superboy is esconced in his own time, but he fails to take into account that even though Superboy is not in the next atomic instant after he was hurled back into the past, he was in the atomic instant before. So how come when Superman passes by the 30th Century the second time, he doesn't become stuck by Superboy's presence before he was hurled back, by his own presence the first time around, or by all of Superboy's and his time-journeys which established their presence in some other era than their native one? The obvious answer is that, contrary to what it seemed, the presence of a temporal counterpart at any given future (or past) instant does not become a roadblock to other selves traveling at other times. Why it was in this one instance is left unjustified.

DC Comics Presents #1, 2 vie with a select group of stories for setting the high-water mark for density of fallacies in a single time travel story.

Reality Rating: D.

Challengers of the Unknown #85-87, "The Creature from the End of Time," "The War at Time's End," "Twelve Million Years to Twilight," by Gerry Conway, April-August 1978, DC.

When mysterious radioactive cubes from the future bearing giant mutated monsters appear, the Challengers seek out the aid of the long-lost Rip Hunter, Time-Master. Although he is nowhere to be seen, they use his timesphere to go to Twelve Million A.D., the era that Carbon-14 dating indicated the monsters were from. (Apparently, this method works in reverse.) Somehow pinpointing the precise date, the Challengers journey there to find that Hunter has been brainwashed by the Sunset Lords into giving up his secrets of time travel so they could dispose of their genetic throwbacks in the past. (Admirably, they were not afraid of causing past divergences that would affect their Reality.) The Challengers combine forces with Lucas Lawspeaker and his rebels to defeat the Sunset Lords. Although there is no mention of how a being with the mutant abilities of Lawspeaker came to be in this genetically-determined society, nor what happened to Hunter's crew of three, this story contains no major fallacies of time travel.

Reality Rating: B.

What If? #4, "What If the Invaders Had Stayed Together After the War?" by Roy Thomas, August 1977, Marvel.

What If? #5, "What If Captain America Hadn't Vanished During World War Two?" by Don Glut, October 1977, Marvel.

What If? #6, "What If the Fantastic Four Had Different Super-Powers?" by Roy Thomas, December 1977, Marvel.

What If? #7, "What If Someone Else Besides Spider-Man Had Been Bitten by the Radioactive Spider?" by Don Glut, February 1977, Marvel.

What If? #8, "What If the World Knew Daredevil Was Blind?" by Don Glut, April 1977, Marvel.

What If? #9, "What If the Avengers Had Fought Evil During the 1950s?" by Don Glut, June 1978, Marvel.

What If? #10, "What If Jane Foster Had Found the Hammer of Thor?" by Don Glut, August 1978, Marvel.

What If? #11, "What If the Original Marvel Bullpen Had Become the Fantastic Four?" by Jack Kirby, October 1978, Marvel.

What If? continues to be Marvel's bimonthly excursion into alternate worlds tangential to Marvel-Earth. While half of the tales listed above satisfy the original premise of the *What If?* series, that is, "The Reality of the Marvel Universe is identical up until a single significant point, at which a divergence in history occurs creating a Marvel-Earth different in some way from the one we are most familiar with," half of them do not.

In *What If?* #10 and #11, we have two situations that could not have been derived from Marvel-Earth as we know it at any point depicted in past stories. In *What If?* #10, the Divergent Factor, or the first significant point at which the Reality of the story differs from that of mainstream Reality, is *not* when Jane Foster finds the cane/hammer in the Norwegian cave instead of Don Blake, nor is it even that Jane Foster was hired by Blake earlier than on Marvel-Earth and she was invited to go on vacation with him. Rather, the true divergence occurs an unspecified time before, when something happens to Odin's wife, Frigga. That Odin has no mate at the time of this story (enabling him to monogamously marry Jane Foster at the story's end) is mentioned in a footnote on page 45. Whether Frigga perished at some point in the past, making *that* the Divergent Factor precipitating the tale, or if she never existed at all, giving these gods of Asgard next-to-no relationship to the ones appearing in *Thor*, is unspecified.

In *What If?* #11, the Divergent Factor is *not* Stan Lee and the Bullpen receiving the cosmic box from the Skrulls which transformed them into the Fantastic Four, but rather whatever incident prevented the Marvel-Earth Fantastic Four from coming into being. If the world that *What If?* #11 diverges from is indeed Marvel-Earth (as the presence of the Sub-Mariner would indicate), something would have had to happen to Reed Richards and crew such that they didn't become the Fantastic Four, so that the Marvel Bullpen would be assuming original identities, not those borrowed from unacknowledged contemporaries. Whether Richards and crew never went up in the rocket that led to their cosmic

powers, or whether they perished in the attempt is unspecified, but we must assume that they exist or had existed. Otherwise, the point of their not-coming-into-being becomes the Divergent Factor for the story. Once again, the true divergence in a *What If?* tale has been allowed to happen off-panel.

Two other *What If?* tales do not live up to the *What If?* premise in another way. In *What If?* #4 and #9, doubt is textually expressed as to whether the story told is an alternate Reality or merely a hitherto unknown aspect of Marvel-Earth's mainstream history. The Watcher, who should be able to distinguish, remains coy in both cases. In the name of simplicity, it is assumed that unless any contradictions crop up, the narratives of these two issues are indeed chronicles of Marvel history.

Of the four *What If?* tales that succeed in accomplishing the basic prerequisite of the genre, *What If?* #7 is the tritest. In separate vignettes, three of Peter Parker's acquaintances, Flash Thompson, Betty Brant, and John Jameson, decide to attend the same science lecture where, in mainstream history, Parker was bitten by the spider that gave him the powers of Spider-Man. In the Thompson scenario, the would-be "Captain Spider" meets his doom because he didn't have the know-how to create a web solution. In the Brant scenario, the would-be "Spider-Girl" accidentally allows the burglar who went on to kill Ben Parker to escape (in a coincidence of the nth degree), thus vowing to give up her superhero identity. In the Jameson scenario, "Spider Jameson" is killed saving the astronaut who took his place in the space program when he dropped out to be a superhero (another uneasy parallel to mainstream history). The conclusion to all three vignettes is the same: Peter Parker analyzes the radioactive spider and isolates its power-giving properties, conferring them upon himself. That three discrete divergences would culminate in identical solutions is very misleading, since Reality never tends towards simplicity, but towards diversity. The less perceptive readers of this tale may even be misled into thinking that Reality merged for three separate parallel Earths. It is obvious to most fictional realists that the three Reality Lines were for a short interval harmonic with one another before breaking off in their own unique directions. This is a point that should have been made in the story itself, rather than the mystical implication of "manifest destiny." It is absurd to think that Peter Parker *must* become Spider-Man in all or even most possible worlds.

What If? #5 is a fairly successful story depicting what would happen if Bucky had not perished in 1945 and Captain America had not gone into suspended animation. Its one flaw is a dramatic one rather than a reality-related one. In the course of the story, Nick Fury dies in the Korean War, conveniently opening the way for the semi-retired Steve Rogers to become Director of SHIELD. While strictly from the standpoint of theory there is nothing to prevent other Divergent Factors such as Fury's death from cropping up in an independent Reality, from the dramatic standpoint it was totally unrelated to the story's initial premise, and hence seemed like an intrusion.

What If? #6 spotlighted random chance as its Divergent Factor, as the cosmic rays that plucked certain subconscious thoughts out of the minds of the Fantastic Four to use as the basis for their power manifestation, plucks *different* subconscious thoughts. *What If?* #8 is probably the most successful of the current crop of *What If?*s. In the story, we have a believably-related sequence of events that veers Reality along its own path. Electro's discovery that Daredevil is blind leads to Karen Page's discovery of his identity, which leads to an operation that restores his sight and removes his extrasensory powers. There are no extraneous factors, no coincidental parallels to mainstream Reality, and no assertions of "manifest destiny."

In general, the terminology in *What If?* #4-11 pertaining to parallel Earths and divergences has not been as precise as it was in the first three issues of the magazine. That *What If?* stories are tales that diverge from the mainstream Marvel Universe as we know it, and not "imaginary tales," stories that proceed from any given premise no matter how preposterous (i.e., what if Don Blake and Tony Stark were brothers) is not as clear as it once was. In most issues, the narrating Watcher mentions that the stories take place on "parallel Earths," but does not note that these Earths were not always in existence. In #11, the Watcher comes closest to reiterating the concept of Divergence: "I am the Watcher, and it is my task to observe the realm of alternate universes. This context embraces an endless succession of duplicate Earths, differing from one another at critical points." If the word "diverging" had been substituted for the nebulous "differing," it would have been much clearer.

The *What If?* concept remains a good one, informative as well as entertaining; it is a pity that its writers often seem to be unable to work within its context.

Reality Ratings: #4: C. #5: B. #6: B. #7: C. #8: B. #9: C. #10: D. #11: D.

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RESURRECTION IN THE DC MULTIVERSE

by Edward B. Via

For most superheroes, the acquisition of powers and abilities far beyond those of mortal men marks the turning point in their lives. For those with no super-powers, the decision to embark upon a crusade against evil without such abilities is, in itself, a turning point. But in a handful of instances, becoming a superhero isn't a turning point in life at all. Rather, it is something that coincides with or immediately follows the end of that person's life.

How does a given individual begin a superheroic career *after* shuffling off the mortal coil? For what reason are such people denied the serenity, suffering, or oblivion which awaits them in the afterlife? What, if anything, do these "Afterlifers" have in common?

In examining these questions, our frame of reference will be the DC Multiverse. For, while the Marvel Multiverse presents a raft of contenders for Omniversal awareness,[1] the DC Multiverse contains a plethora of beings who have returned to Earth in spiritual form rather than passing to whatever unearthly hereafter there may be.

Aerialist Boston Brand began his career as an Afterlife superhero shortly after being shot to death in the midst of his trapeze act.[2] As his body was covered up and carted off, Brand discovered that he still existed as a disembodied spirit. The goddess Rama Kushna,[3] also called "The Spirit of the Universe," explained to him that he had been granted a form of existence for as long as it took to track down his killer. Assuming his stage name, Brand became Deadman.

Deadman soon discovered the conditions of his ghostly existence: he was invisible and intangible, unable to touch anything or be heard by anyone. However, he could "possess" other people's bodies and thus control their actions. From the time he entered their forms to the time he left, he, in effect, *was* that person, and his host had no memory of events that took place while he was in him. Although Deadman retained his consciousness while occupying others, he was still bound by the physical limitations of the individual he had "taken over." And, if his actions were to result in their deaths, they would not come back to life after he took leave of their bodies. Thus Deadman's Earthbound afterlife was one in which he was forced to use others to achieve his ends. Because the task of finding his killer was so fraught with danger, he was plagued with guilt for having to put others' lives in jeopardy.

But Deadman's ultimate death-defying act did not end with the discovery of his killer.[4] Rama Kushna gave him the option of going to his "final rest" or living out his days in Nanda Parbat, a Shangri-La on Earth where spirits have substance, and where Rama Kushna herself is said to dwell.[5] Boston Brand chose a third alternative: to remain as a ghost in the outside world in order to help maintain the balance of good and evil in the world. This he has done (on the side of good), often in tandem with living superheroes.[6] Although there were some doubts raised as to whether the man who died in *Strange Adventures* #215 was really his killer,[7] there has been nothing substantial to indicate that his continuing existence is due to anything other than his pact with Rama Kushna.

1. See F. Lovece, "Marvel Omnipotents, Omniversal Awareness," *Omniverse* #1, 1977.
2. *Strange Adventures* #205, October 1967.
3. Rama Kushna may be related to Rama Krishna, the 19th Century Hindu philosopher.
4. *Strange Adventures* #216, January-February 1969.
5. *The Brave and the Bold* #86, October-November 1969.
6. The Forever People, Batman, Aquaman, the Challengers of the Unknown, and Phantom Stranger.
7. *The Forever People* #10, August-September 1972, misleadingly suggests that the killer of Boston Brand had a hook on his right hand rather than his left. But logic dictates that since the omniscient Rama

Perhaps the most powerful entity to walk the Earth in the entire DC Multiverse is another Afterlifer, The Spectre. The Spectre was granted ghostly existence by the mysterious Voice (commonly thought to be that of "God") who spoke to detective Jim Corrigan after Corrigan had been murdered by gangsters.[8] As The Spectre, Corrigan's spirit was endowed with vast, almost unlimited power. He could transmute matter, expand his ethereal form to immense proportions, even bend time and space to his will. The Spectre's body was composed of "psycho-matter" (or ectoplasm), and only other ectoplasmic entities could inflict harm upon him. Whereas Deadman possessed the body of anyone he chose (apparently overwhelming the spirit belonging to that body), The Spectre had but a single host body, that of his physical self, Jim Corrigan. Corrigan's body was resurrected by The Voice for the sole purpose of giving The Spectre a resting place. The Spectre could leave and reenter Corrigan's body at will (except if another spirit took his place while he was out), and Corrigan did not depend on The Spectre's presence within in order to maintain the semblance of life. The Spectre, as a supernatural agent of Good, and Jim Corrigan, as a mortal agent of the Law, have fought the forces of Evil together, if not side-by-side, making them one of the most intriguing alter egos in recorded history.

Jim Corrigan was born and died on the parallel world designated Earth-Two, and it was there that The Spectre was reborn to fight evil. During the late 1940s, The Spectre seemingly went into limbo. Later, it was learned that Asmodeus, an agent of the demon Shathan, had imprisoned The Spectre within Jim Corrigan's form.[9] When he was revived some twenty years later, The Spectre lent his awesome attributes to combatting Asmodeus and Shathan, as well as other supernatural threats to the multiverse such as Shan-Zi, Kali the Death-Goddess, and the extra-dimensional Anti-Matter Man. Yet, The Spectre was also active when Evil assumed less cosmic proportions, and it was from his inability to cope with petty mortal evil that his later predicaments stemmed.

In *Spectre* #8, Jim Corrigan refused to let his ghostly counterpart back into his body until he rescued him from a gang of criminals. Needing to be encompassed in his host's body just as mortals need sleep, The Spectre responded with irritation and ill-judgment, letting loose an ethereal blast at the criminals which accidentally struck an innocent. For this indiscretion, he was summoned before The Voice, who gave him a "weakness" to diminish his power at critical moments. Soon after, when The Spectre again forgot himself and took the life of a criminal, The Voice proclaimed, "You have abused your powers by deeming yourself the personal judge of Life and Death... No single creature may hold this unto himself."[10] The Spectre was then

Kushna appeared to him in connection with his finding the left-handed Hook and not the latter one, the later Hook was not his true killer. The Scavengers unit may well be an adjunct to the Society of Assassins that his true killer worked for.

8. *More Fun* #52, February 1940.
9. *Showcase* #60, February 1966.
10. *Spectre* #9, April 1969. Apparently what The Voice meant was that former mortals

sentenced to carry the Journal of Judgment, which listed the names of mortals whose lives he was to judge, in order to teach him to distinguish between justice and vengeance. Ostensibly, the sentence extended for every page of the thick tome, but we are afforded but five such judgments.[11]

When next glimpsed, The Spectre was present at a Justice Society meeting called on the eve of the world's potential destruction. We learn in *Justice League* #83 that The Spectre now resided in a crypt and had to be summoned in order to act. The transition from his being bound to the Journal and his imprisonment in the crypt is unrecounted,[12] but it can be surmised that since he did not resume his former standing, he must have failed his lesson in judgment. Apparently The Voice determined that he was not to be given back his autonomy, and so he was relieved of both his task and his freedom. No longer could the astral avenger venture forth at will and use his vast abilities for petty matters. Now, he could only walk the Earth when there was cosmic evil to be reckoned with, or when he was asked to intervene in Earth's behalf.

Summoned by Doctor Fate to save the Earth from Creator-2, The Spectre was caught in an explosion in interdimensional space which dispersed his ectoplasmic substance.[13] The Spectre pronounced, "At last I've atoned for crimes I have committed and those I have not!"[14]

The Spectre was subsequently seen in two separate existences. In *Justice League* #123, he had again found Earth-Two, and seemed to be wandering the Earth freely. Witnessing the deaths of six Justice Society members, he interceded in their behalf and The Voice resurrected them.[15] But in *Adventure* #431, The Spectre also became active somewhere in the multiverse other than Earth-Two.[16] This Spectre was an instrument of vengeance, meting out ghastly retribution to mortals who committed crimes. This Spectre knew no concept of mercy and ruthlessly tortured those mortals he dealt with. It is apparent from these two vastly divergent counterparts that something happened to The Spectre after that explosion in interdimensional space. It would seem that his ectoplasmic substance was hurled to at least two different dimensional worlds, where they formed whole Spectres.[17] While on Earth-Two, he was subject to The Voice of a god of mercy; on the other Earth, he was an agent of The Voice of a god of vengeance. Although we have seen but a finite number of episodes of The Spectre of vengeance (*Adventure* #431-440), he may still exist today as an entity apart from The Spectre of Earth-Two.

An even greater aura of mystery surrounds the being known as the Phantom Stranger, whose inclusion as an Afterlife superhero is conjectural, since his origin has never been disclosed. What is known about him, his powers and his mission, suggests a supernatural being along resurrectionary lines.[18]

The first chronicles we have of the Stranger depicted him as little more than an anecdote teller.[19] Gradually, the accounts revealed him taking a more active role in the supernatural custody of Earth-One. Elusive, sometimes maddeningly cryptic, the Stranger battled mystical opponents with whom he seemed to have more in common than he does with mere mortals. He was able to appear and disappear anywhere at will, he had command of a vast array of arcane spells, he was able to perceive ghosts (such as Deadman), and he had certain dimension-spanning capabilities. Most telling is that he had been shown to be able to enter into the "dimen-

like The Spectre were not permitted to pass judgment on life and death, while it was perfectly permissible for entities like itself to do so, as it did when he granted Jim Corrigan new life.

11. *Spectre* #9, 10, April-June 1969.
12. An Editor's Note in *Justice League* #83 states, "The reason The Spectre abides in the crypt may not be related now... Rest assured that the story is a fearsome one indeed." (Page 15.)
13. Why this explosion should have proved any more "fatal" to The Spectre than the one he survived in *Justice League* #46 must have had something to do with The Voice's diminishment of his powers.
14. *Justice League* #83, September 1970, page 21.
15. Hence Robin, Wonder Woman, Wildcat, Hourman, Dr. Mid-Nite, and Johnny Thunder are also resurrectionary heroes, even if no one knows it but The Spectre.
16. Evidence to attest to this is that in *Adventure* #435, Corrigan and another policeman are making a joke about Superman's secret identity, indicating that it is common knowledge in this world.
17. The Spectre's ability to split into multiple whole selves is documented in *Spectre* #4, June 1969.
18. It has been speculated that the Phantom Stranger is really a counterpart to ghost debunker Terry Thirteen, who underwent an initiation into the secrets of the supernatural.
19. *Phantom Stranger* #1-6, August-September 1952-June-July 1953, *Showcase* #80, February 1969, *Phantom Stranger* #1-41, May-June 1969-February-March 1976.

sion of death" and come out again with no effect to his being.[20] This is substantial evidence that if the Stranger were not one time dead, he is at the very least beyond the power of death. Like The Spectre of mercy, the Phantom Stranger's scope of power extended mostly into the spiritual plane, and it seems the purpose of his decidedly ethereal existence was to protect the mortal plane from supernatural danger.

Doctor Fate is another powerful supernatural entity who does not precisely qualify as an Afterlifer, but has the distinction of having become a resurrectionary hero without having had to die. Years ago, young Kent Nelson was exploring the ruins of Ur with his archaeologist father, when he discovered the tomb of Nabu, a Sumerian sorcerer. The gas that kept Nabu in suspended animation killed the elder Nelson, but mysteriously spared the young Kent. Nabu awoke and took the youth as a disciple, aged him to maturity, and taught him mastery over the mystic arts. As his final test, Kent Nelson was bidden to direct a spell at his mentor which would release the living essence that dwelled in Nabu.[21] This essence described itself as an "exiled Lord of Order,"[22] who had taken the human form of Nabu in his endless battle against the forces of Chaos. But after two millennia of suspended animation, the Lord of Order's battle-worn shell had still not recuperated enough for the eternal fight, so he had to take on a new host body. Fashioning a golden helmet and medallion by which Nelson could summon the mystical presence within him, the Lord of Order possessed the young man, leaving the shell of Nabu to crumble to dust. Henceforth, Kent Nelson became the Earth-bound proprietor of the powers of Order known as Doctor Fate.

As Fate, Nelson was impervious to aging, able to levitate, pass through solid substances, transmute matter, traverse dimensions, and work great feats of magic. The Doctor Fate persona was distinct from Nelson's own, much as The Spectre's was distinct from Corrigan's. Unlike The Spectre and Deadman, Fate's body was not ectoplasmic but physical; hence he was vulnerable to corporal attack.

Another hero with his roots in ancient civilization is Carter Hall, the Hawkman of Earth-Two. Hall was said to be the reincarnation of Egyptian Prince Khufu, who was murdered by the priest Hath-Set and brought to life millennia later by the Egyptian god Anubis.[23] As a reincarnation Carter Hall was a mortal with no supernatural powers. Employing the anti-gravity Nth Metal (later called Ninth Metal) which he invented, and a pair of artificial wings, Hall became the Hawkman.[24]

Elsewhere in the DC Multiverse,[25] an amnesiac youth who drowned became an Afterlife hero when the mysterious agent of death, Mr. Keeper, took him to the Hereafter—a realm seeming to exist on clouds—before his appointed time. In recompense for the mistake, the youth was granted "the strength and power of all the great men of the past."[26] When he spoke the word "Eternity,"[27] he could summon any person in history or mythology to do his bidding. Traveling the Earth with Mr. Keeper, the boy called himself Kid Eternity, and served the cause of justice.

While there are undoubtedly more resurrectionary heroes to contend with, patterns already emerge in the origins of the heroes outlined above. Except in the case of the Phantom Stranger, whose origin is shrouded in mystery, each of the Afterlifers has in common the intervention of a supernatural entity of more-than-human heritage: Rama Kushna, a goddess approximating a Hindu deity; The Voice, a bodiless omnipotent; Nabu, one of a number of Lords of Order dwelling in the multiverse; Anubis, an Egyptian god; and Mr. Keeper, a ghostly emissary of Eternity. The mortals who were transformed by these supernaturals to become agents of Good and Order and Justice seem, for the most part, to have been selected for immortal destinies by strength of character. Their destinies certainly had nothing to do with acts of faith; before their transformations, it is unlikely that most of the heroes even heard of the deity who chose them.

The portrait of the Afterlife that is painted by the chronicles of resurrected heroes is one of uncertainty and mystery. Sentient beings in the DC Multiverse have no assurance what awaits them beyond death's door. There would appear to be no system by which a soul passes into the dominion of one of these benevolent gods and goddesses of life and death, or those of such malevolent nether-entities as Tala, Shathan, Kali, Azgore, Pluto, and Satan. The fact that we have seen relatively few souls reincarnated on the mortal plane (as either a physical or ethereal being) leads one to conclude that most souls pass to another plane of existence rather than being recycled to Earth.

Is the consignment of souls an orderly aspect of the DC Multiverse? Are the various gods and goddesses of the Hereafter aware of the others' existences? Did they at one time get together to decide who had dominion over what? These are questions that are in want of conclusive answers.

We may assume that just as there are multiple physical planes (parallel Earths) in each multiverse, so there are multiple spiritual planes, enough for each omnipotent to have his/her own realm, if need be.[28] Perhaps when the multiverse was younger, all such entities had a common origin: the Lords (and Ladies) of Order and Chaos, as Nabu referred to them. They may, of course, be of diverse origin and still, by predilection, qualify as Lords or Ladies of Order and Chaos.

Just as these omnipotents cull agents from the multitude of lesser beings, perhaps they, too, are agents of still higher beings. Nabu described himself as "a being created fully developed, knowing no childhood—a guardian condemned to Earth for eternity."[29] But what was it that created him, or exiled him? Ultimately, we may be dealing with an entity whose scope embraces the entire DC Multiverse, much like the Eternity of the Marvel Multiverse.

At present, with the scanty evidence afforded us, we can only conjecture about matters after death. But when we are dealing with forces to whom Life and Death are relative rather than absolute, perhaps there are things that will remain beyond mortal reckoning. ■

20. *Justice League* #145, August 1977.
21. In the original account of Doctor Fate's origin (*More Fun* #67, May 1941), Nabu was said to be a space god from the planet Cilia, whose race's advancement made them privy to the "secrets of the universe." We can regard this early account as being rather gross example of the Distortion Effect and accept the latter version as more accurate.
22. *Secret Origins of the Super-Heroes Special*, Vol. 2, #10, 1977, page 6.
23. The fact that Anubis is depicted here as a hawk rather than in his traditional guise as a jackal may indicate that the Distortion Effect is running rampant. The closest thing to a hawk-god in the Egyptian pantheon is Horus, the falcon-god.
24. *Flash* #1, January 1940.
25. Earth-S, according to DC scholar E. Nelson Bridwell.
26. *Hit Comics* #25, December 1942.
27. Whether this is a connection with the Rock of Eternity upon which dwell the Elders that gave Billy Batson the powers of Captain Marvel is undocumented.
28. These spiritual planes may correspond to fractional vibration rates. See pages 28-33 of *A Treatise on Reality in Comic Literature* by Mark Gruenwald, 1976.
29. *Secret Origins, loc. cit.*

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